On the Edge of the Wilderness

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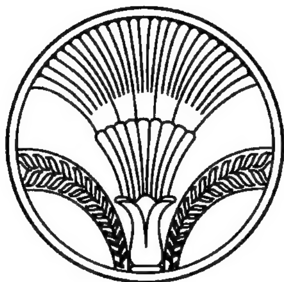

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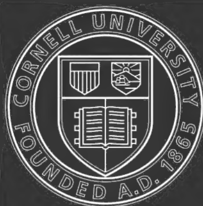

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He snarled a defiance, but he circled the little herd
and trotted away

On the Edge of the Wilderness

TALES OF OUR WILD ANIMAL NEIGHBORS

By

WALTER PRICHARD EATON

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL

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On the Edge of the Wilderness

Note

THE author acknowledges indebtedness to more than one acquaintance for observed records of animal behavior, which he has incorporated in these tales. His thanks are especially due to William Sargood, Deputy Game Warden for Southern Berkshire (Massachusetts), to Hamilton Gibson, to Walter King Stone, and to Warwick S. Carpenter, of the New York State Conservation Commission. The primary object of the stories being, however, to reconstruct imaginatively the life of the wild creatures while they are not under observation, but living out their normal existence, the author would not seem in any way to shift the responsibility for the natural history herein contained.

W. P. E.

Twin Fires,
Sheffield, Massachusetts.

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On the Edge of the Wilderness

CHAPTER I

"THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE"

THE trouble with Swiftfoot, the big gray timber wolf, undoubtedly was that he didn't know he was extinct in that part of America. All the wise books said he was, so, quite obviously, he had no business there. As a matter of fact, neither he nor his companion was making any public display. Swiftfoot had nothing to fear in the deep woods. There were no panthers. The Canada lynx might snarl at him, or fight him if he tried to take away its kill—but he never tried. From the lumbering black bears he could easily run away, if there were any occasion. There wouldn't be, of course, unless he attempted to secure a little juicy cub steak. For the rest, he was master of the forest. But there was one thing he dreaded, dreaded with an abiding fear,

and that was a high-power rifle, the shining black stick which men, those slow, two-legged creatures with the peculiar smell, carry in their hands, and which make a great noise, spit fire, and kill from a long way off.

Swiftfoot's earliest grown up recollections had to do with men and rifles. He was one of a pack, a fine, strong pack of nine gray wolves which hunted and traveled together, well knowing the value of union. They ranged a different forest from this one where he now was, a forest of low evergreens, with numerous bogs overlaid by a shaking carpet of sphagnum moss, far up in the cold north. The nine of them, tongues out, teeth gleaming, eyes dilated, would run a young moose or a deer for hours through this land, driving him if they could to some bog at last where he broke through, and Swiftfoot and his fellows, held up on the shaking moss, caught him on flank and throat and shoulder, and killed him, and feasted. Then, one day, the two-legged creatures came, with the funny smell. One of them had discovered something yellow in the ground, and all the rest followed, and began to dig the earth, and cut

the trees. Winter followed, the game grew scarce. The great horned owls and the goshawks got most of the rabbits before Swiftfoot and his pack could round them up. The pack grew lean. They closed in around the trail over which the two-legged animals came, driving dog sleds. When the dogs smelled the wolf pack they barked and snarled and became ridiculously excited, and the men animals got out their black sticks.

Swiftfoot remembered how old Whitefang, the leader of the pack, grew cautious, and tried to hold the other eight back, but they were lean with hunger, and the dog meat smelled good, and even the queer-smelling meat of the two-legged creatures. So the pack followed, one mile, two miles, three miles, just in the fringe of the evergreens by the trail, waiting to close in when the whipped and straining dogs should be too tired to fight, and the queer creatures too tired to make those strange noises.

At last Whitefang could hold them no longer. With a snarl and a bark, they closed in out of the dark woods, into the starlight of the snowy trail. Instantly there were half a dozen flashes, half a

dozen loud reports, and even as he leaped at the throat of a dog, Swiftfoot saw Whitefang rolling over on the snow, and another wolf half leap into the air and tumble back with blood spouting from its mouth. But he kept on and had his teeth in the woolly throat of a dog, harnessed and unable to fight, while the air resounded with snarls, barks, cries, and the terrible, loud explosions. Suddenly something stung Swiftfoot in the tail, near the base, the pain infuriating him. It couldn't have been the dog he had by the throat. He let go his hold to turn on his new adversary, and at the same instant something hit him on the head—a shining black stick swung by one of the two-legged creatures. He fell down unconscious.

When he came to he was conscious of the smell of blood, wolf blood. Staggering up, he looked about. The snow was stained where he himself had lain, and his tail ached and was clotted with frozen blood. He sat down again and licked the wound. The bullet, a small automatic pistol ball, fortunately for him had only entered the tail (where it was still lodged, as a matter of fact), and had not injured the muscles of his hind quar-

ters. When he had licked the frozen blood away and could feel the soothing of his own warm tongue, Swiftfoot got up again and poked around. There was no scent nor sound of the men and dogs. The sleds had moved far on. The bodies of four of his companions lay on the snow. He sniffed them. Three were dead, the fourth—Softfur, the mate of Fang—was alive. Swiftfoot crouched beside her and began to lick her face. She wasn't his mate, but she was alive, and he hated to be alone. You don't fare so well when you hunt alone. Suddenly he pricked up his ears, and elevated his muzzle, baring his teeth with an angry snarl. There was an answering growl from the undergrowth by the trail, and the gray form of Fang suddenly emerged. Swiftfoot's ears went down, his tail moved, like a dog's, causing him a twinge of pain, and he resigned the task of resuscitating Softfur to Fang, turning his attention again to his own wound.

Softfur, like him, had been knocked unconscious by the butt of a rifle. Fang was unhurt; he had fled. If Swiftfoot had been a dog, he would have called Fang a coward, and despised

him. But he was a wolf, and respected the instinct of self-preservation. Beside, he was glad enough to have companions. When Softfur had recovered consciousness, the three of them, seeing but three dead bodies, howled a signal to the other three, the missing ones. There was no answer. Fang had been the only one, so far as he knew, to escape. One other, attempting it, had been shot down. Evidently the two-legged creatures had carried off three of the bodies. Without further ado, the starved survivors fell on the carcases of their own recent companions, and got back their strength.

Even as they were eating, a flock of great horned owls went by overhead, flying south. Northward lay deeper snow, harder hunting, and northward the terrible two-legged creatures with guns had gone. Southward the owls must know there was game, rabbits and partridges, anyway, or they wouldn't be flying that way. The three wolves rose, shook themselves, slunk off the trail into the timber, and trotted south.

They traveled and hunted chiefly at night, and rested by day in dry caves or under thick stands

of little balsams or spruces, where the snow was light. Food was scarce, and often they went for long periods with nothing at all to eat. Finally they came to a great river, barring their southward march. This river was partly frozen, but in mid-stream a belt of open current shone black under the cold winter moon. Softfur howled her disappointment, and there came an answering howl from some dog not far off. They were amid the homes of men now, with danger on every side. Fang trotted deliberately out on the ice, to the edge of the black water. Softfur and Swiftfoot followed him. He was the leader, and where he went, they went.

Then he moved up-stream till he came to a spot where great floating ice cakes, like rafts, were swirled in close by the current. He watched the direction these cakes took after leaving the edge again. Satisfied with what he saw, he gave a short, sharp bark and leaped to a big cake, the others following him. Standing on this raft, the three wolves floated down-stream in the still moonlight, till the opposite ice edge began to draw near. When it was evident that the cake they

floated on was as close as it would get, Fang went off into the water, and swam. A few strokes, and he was struggling out, and shaking the water hastily from his coat before it should freeze. The other two followed, and then the three of them trotted rapidly over the ice, to the wooded banks, warming themselves with brisk motion.

The St. Lawrence was behind them.

Still they moved south, through a snow-buried world. There was far less cover than they liked. Great stretches of open country had to be crossed, where there were strange, box-like things full of lights and creatures with the odd smell. There was little game in the woods. Hunger drove them on, southward, after the owls, and the goshawks, too. Once, on their tracks, they heard a dog, a single dog. They fanned out, Fang and his mate swinging back to the left, Swiftfoot to the right, galloping rapidly, and reunited behind the dog. Now the pursuer was pursued. The three gray wolves, with a speed greater than his, closed in on the cruising hound, so that he became aware of it, and ran for his life. But he lacked their speed and their wind. Before he reached the

fields about his house, they were upon him and dragged him down, and his master never knew why he didn't come home.

That meal helped them on their southward way.

They came presently to something quite new in their experience—mountains. These mountains, low at first, but soon getting higher and higher, were covered with forests or scrub, and though the valleys between held farms and roads—the dreaded signs of the two-legged creatures with the fire sticks—Swiftfoot and his two companions learned speedily that by keeping well up on the ridges they could travel long distances in perfect safety. These ridges, too, led steadily southward. And the hunting was good again!

In fact, they had scarcely entered this mountain region before they picked up the fresh track of a deer, and were off in full cry. It gave them a long, hard run, taking them finally far up on a rocky ledge, where they pulled the buck down, and feasted royally on fresh venison, the first they had tasted for three weeks. That day they slept up in the warm rocks, on the southern slope of the

mountain ledges, and went on again at night with renewed energy. Swiftfoot's tail had quite healed by now, his coat was thick and soft, his wind was good, he had attained his full size, measuring four feet, nine inches from nose to tail, and the prospect of deer meat spurred him on, sometimes ahead of his little pack. He was even thinking of disputing the leadership with Fang. The hunting was so good, in fact, that they didn't get much farther south that season. There came a day when the deep snow on the mountains began to get very wet and heavy, and like rock salt. The brooks roared down over the rocks. In the valleys below they could see great stretches of bare earth, and men moving about. The sun was hotter day by day, and one's fur got damp and sticky from the sloshy snow.

Then Swiftfoot grew unaccountably restless, and so did his two companions. It wasn't that he wanted to hunt. He didn't quite know what he wanted, but it angered him to see Fang and Softfur together, and once he even sprang at Fang. But Fang knew his rights, and fought for them, and Swiftfoot withdrew, nursing a torn throat

muscle. He was still a young wolf, who had never mated—and there was no mate for him. He felt lonely and unsatisfied.

Then, one day, Fang and Softfur disappeared altogether. He sniffed along their trail, out of curiosity, until he came to a warm ledge where, under an overhanging rock, they had excavated a hole. Being a gentleman, as such things go among wolves, and also having a wholesome respect for Fang's jaws, Swiftfoot withdrew, springing up the ledge to the top. Here the timber was all below him, and he looked out over a wide expanse of earth, over valleys and towns, and other ranges of green mountains and a big sheet of silvery water in the distance, with a wall of blue peaks beyond it, that were, of course, the Adirondacks. Well, if his pack was to den here, he might as well spend the coming warm season somewhere about, also. Trotting off, he finally found himself a little half cave, under a ledge, where last autumn's leaves had blown in and made a soft bed. He pawed them up a bit to get the coolness of the under leaves next to his skin, and lay down to sleep. This, he resolved,

should be his home for a while. He was tired of wandering.

In the weeks that followed, Swiftfoot saw little of Fang, and nothing at all of Softfur. It was Fang's task to hunt for his mate and the care of his family was his own particular business, which he shared with nobody. As summer came on, the game, for some reason, grew scarcer, and Swiftfoot more than once met the other going down or coming up the mountain; he was hunting now on dangerous ground, around the clearings of the two-legged creatures. Once he had a chicken in his mouth, once a piece of juicy calf meat. They both smelled good to Swiftfoot, but with only himself to look after, he preferred to go a bit hungry rather than take such chances. Still, he did go down at night to the upper edges of the pastures, in the hope that he might cut a calf out of the herds, and once he came on a fox carrying a chicken, and ran it for a mile, till the fox had to drop his load in order to escape. That was an easy meal!

All went well for some time, until one moonlight night, while he was cruising through the

mountain timber, Swiftfoot heard a great baying of dogs down by the pastures, and which came rapidly up the slope. He pricked up his ears, elevated his nose, assured himself that the dog-pack could not be on his scent, and then trotted swiftly toward the sound, impelled by a great curiosity. The dogs were evidently moving up toward Fang's den. Keeping carefully down wind, and above the dogs on the slope, Swiftfoot drew in. Would Fang get to his den in time to rouse Softfur and the two cubs (there were two, he knew, for he had seen them playing in the sun in front of the den), and start them quickly enough to escape? Of course, the old wolves could outrun the dogs easily, but the cubs couldn't. Or would they stay and fight?

Suddenly the hunt swerved off, and came toward him. Hello, old Fang was going to give the dogs a run! Well, he could do it, all right, but Swiftfoot didn't propose to have the trail cross his. It was too hot a night for such violent exercise. He ran back on his own tracks, till he came to a brook, and trotted up that a way, a trick he had learned from the foxes.

Fang, however, turned down the mountain again, evidently intending to keep the dogs a long way from the den. Suddenly a shot rang out. It hurt Swiftfoot's ears, even from this distance. There was a cry such as the two-legged creatures make, a sudden yelping and snarling of dogs—and then silence. Somehow Swiftfoot knew that Fang was dead. He hunted no more that night, but on padded feet sneaked up to the very top of the mountain and lay under a rock in the dry moss.

It was evident that Fang had gone once too often down the mountain after fresh calf meat. Now the two-legged creatures and their dogs would be making life miserable. Swiftfoot felt like moving on at once, but Softfur and the two cubs held him back. Not that he any longer had a curious feeling when he looked at Softfur—that feeling had passed with the spring. But she was of his pack, and the two cubs, which would be growing fast now, were of his pack, and one hangs with the pack. Sooner or later, Softfur and her cubs, big enough to hunt for themselves, would come to him, and the four of them would

go out together and pull down a fat buck. By himself, he tackled only does. That was why Swiftfoot still remained in the neighborhood, often meeting poor Softfur as she hunted for her young at first, and later hunted with them, teaching them to run, to follow the scent, to spring for the throat or the flank.

It was one hot August morning that Swiftfoot was awakened from his nap under a thick balsam near timber line by the baying of dogs again. They were once more headed for the den, evidently on Softfur's tracks of a few hours before. Swiftfoot roused and trotted along a ledge from which he could get a view of the woods and rocks below. Softfur was out, bounding toward the mountain top, the cubs behind her; but the cubs could not keep her pace, and now and then she had to stop and wait for them. Two dogs, three dogs, broke out of the woods a moment later, a hound with his nose on the trail, a powerful Airedale, and a big, rangy collie. The collie caught sight of Softfur and her cubs high above, and sprang into the lead, abandoning scent altogether. Softfur was in a place where she could retreat in

no direction without encountering rocks too steep and high for the cubs to take at one spring, and in a few moments the dogs were on her. She faced the oncoming rush, teeth bared, hair bristling, the cubs behind her, and as the dogs arrived, she went into them. The hound slipped past her and closed on the he cub, which tore at him as he was about to seize Softfur's hind quarter. But the collie and the Airedale went straight at her throat, as she at theirs. The Airedale, like all his breed, was too reckless, and it was Softfur who got him, not he her. With lightning speed and accuracy, she caught him just under the collar, so her teeth could sink into his throat, and his scream resounded over the lonely rocks of the mountain as she laid him over. But that instant was the collie's chance, and he took it. He went through Softfur's ruff and got the hold he wanted, and as she fought frantically to shake his strangling grip, the hound, which had finished off the cub, closed in on the other side. The three of them rolled over and over on the rocks, one mass of snarl and blood and foam.

Swiftfoot had seen it all begin from his perch

a quarter of a mile away. It was not his fight. Yet it was his fight. There were no men there with fire sticks—only the hated dogs. It was his pack being attacked. Suddenly he let out a long, snarling, terrible scream and came down the rocks like a gray arrow, an arrow that flew straight to its mark, the throat of the hound. The hound let go its hold on Softfur, and tried to meet its new antagonist, but Swiftfoot had the advantage of weight and strength and initiative. He had the hold he wanted, and slowly he laid the hound over, his fangs sinking deeper in, till the dog died beneath him. Then he sprang for the collie. But the collie didn't wait. He let go of Softfur, and as Swiftfoot's fangs bit for his throat, getting tangled in the thick, protective ruff, he ducked his head, slipped sidewise and down, and bounded for the woods below. Swiftfoot didn't follow him. He wasn't fighting because he was hungry; he was fighting to defend the pack. The enemy was driven off. He turned to see the Airedale struggling to his feet, and with a savage snarl, bowled him down again and tore his throat half open. Then he went

over to Softfur and her cub. Both lay still on the rocks. He licked them again and again. They were dead. Swiftfoot lifted his muzzle toward the blue horizon and howled.

There came an answering whine from up the mountain. He changed his tone abruptly, and the second cub came creeping back. It was a she cub, a little, part-grown Softfur. It was all that was left of his pack. It would grow up and be his mate when the spring came round again. Something inside of Swiftfoot made him lick the cub, with his bloody tongue. It drew close to him, with a whine like a little dog, after it had sniffed the dead body of its mother. Swiftfoot tore off a piece of dog meat and offered it food.

That night he moved south along the range, the cub following him, after a good deal of urging and some physical coercion. The place was getting too hot, and he longed for some peaceful forest where men and their hated dogs—hated doubly because they were really renegade wolves who had submitted to the slavery of the man creature—did not know of his presence, and he could hunt in peace. For two nights he traveled, part

of the time encountering signs even up here on the range of the two-legged enemy—a dim blazed trail through the woods, old camp fires, and once, even, a fresh camp fire and men around it. He and little Softfur gave that fire a wide berth, going around it on soft, silent feet, while the campers slept, secure in the knowledge that there were no wolves in New England, and hadn't been for almost a hundred years.

At last he found the spot he wanted—a wild mountain ravine, with a spring that showed tracks of partridges, deer, coons, and other prey on the margin, with good forest cover all about, and all signs of man far away and far below. Here he and little Softfur had immediate good fortune in running down a rabbit, and then found themselves a cosy den of leaves under a big, fallen log, and decided to call it home for a while.

Little Softfur soon forgot her mother, and grew rapidly in size, strength and cunning. She grew so rapidly, in fact, that one day in the crisp autumn Swiftfoot decided, with her aid, to try cutting away a fawn from its mother. They ran the pair several miles before they got the doe cor-

nered, and then closed in for the operation. The doe, alive to the terrible danger, kept the fawn behind her, almost between her hind legs, and by whirling and threatening with her powerful and cruelly sharp hoofs stood the wolves off. One on one side, one on the other, they snarled and leaped, just out of reach of those plunging hoofs, trying to get at the fawn's throat or shoulder. Swiftfoot knew the game, and had no trouble in escaping. He was willing to take his time, well aware that his wind and strength would outlast the deer's. But little Softfur, impetuous and tremendously excited, made one dash too close, and down came the lance-like hoofs, crash on her spine and ribs. She crumpled up. With a wild snarl, Swiftfoot was at the doe's throat, but it was too late. One hoof had gone right through the little wolf's back and into her heart. She was dead.

Swiftfoot, in a kind of blind fury, killed the deer, but the meat was without savor. He stayed near that spot for several days, till the deer was finished, yet not so much to finish the meat as because he felt a dumb grief, a sense of loneliness.

He was without any companions now, any sense of the comfort and protection of the pack. And what would he do when the snows began to soften, when the south wind came through the forests and a warm mist gathered around the mountain tops, and that great longing for a mate came over him?

At last, up here on the ridges, three thousand feet above the sea, what was rain in the valleys was snow that settled over the rocks and sifted down out of a cloud through the trees. The north wind blew cold, and Swiftfoot was filled with restlessness again, the wanderlust was upon him. He would go on, and on, until he found some other pack he could join. Perhaps because it had become a habit, perhaps because he knew the way was so long back to the northland he had come from, across the great river, he turned southward once more.

For many nights he traveled, keeping always to the cover of the forests and ridges. Now and then he had to cross a road, but for a long distance he was practically in wilderness. Then, one moonlight night, he came upon a broad road, run-

ning east and west right over the big ridge. In the distance he heard a great roaring, and caught a strange, pungent odor. He shrank back into the bushes, crouched and waiting. Two blinding lamps, like huge eyes, came around a bend. An iron thing, with the men creatures sitting in it, thundered by, leaving the strange smell behind.

Swiftfoot rose and crossed the Mohawk Trail, and no Mohawk that sneaked along that path when it was a dim track in the ancient wilderness ever stole with softer footsteps or vanished more like a ghost into the dusk of the forest.

More than ever now Swiftfoot missed the pack. The deer were numerous everywhere. Never was such good hunting in his experience. Yet for one lone wolf it was hard and dangerous work. The fawns were getting their growth, to be sure, and when one wandered away from its mother he could pull it down easily enough. But as yet they stuck pretty close still to the old deer, and a solitary wolf has to work sometimes for hours at a stretch to cut out a fawn, or even take to his heels if the buck appears. There weren't many rabbits nor grouse. The hawks and owls,

the previous winter, had attended to them. With a great hatred for all dogs in his heart, Swiftfoot grew bold, sometimes even reckless, in running a lone dog when he picked up the trail in the woods, or even in the half-abandoned fields which ran in and out of the broken hill country in which he now found himself. All his savagery he vented on these dogs, killing sometimes merely for the sport of it, for the zest of battle, and licking his own wounds well for a day or two thereafter, in some nest of leaves under a mountain rock.

But he encountered no wolves, and no sign of wolves. He was alone, in a strange land.

Then, suddenly, as he was trotting along through a young forest of spruce, having earlier that night skirted the hills to the east of a strange light which seemed to steam up from a bowl in the hills (it was a city) and crossed a railroad track, he came on familiar tracks which he had not seen nor smelled since he left his far northern home. One, two, three tracks, a bull moose and two cows! Moose meat! His tongue lolled out, and drops of saliva trickled from his jaws! Oh, for a pack to help him hunt! Alone, he was helpless.

Surely there must be a pack somewhere, if there were moose again. Moose belong to the big woods. He trotted down the tracks, to have a look at the quarry. As he drew in close to the big creatures, feeding in a deep swamp, himself having to leap from tussock to tussock, the bull got his scent and reared angry antlers with a snort. Swiftfoot, alone and unaided, had no intention of a contest with those horns. He snarled a defiance, but he circled the little herd and trotted away, intent on finding a pack to help him.

As he moved off, from four or five miles away came a thin whistle. It meant little to Swiftfoot. He did not know it was a night freight leaving the Lenox station. He was unaware of the startling contrast between his presence here, and that town of expensive villas and modern, luxuriant civilization, so close beside him. He still trotted southward. But he met no wolf pack. He did not know there had been no wolf pack here for a hundred years, that he, and he alone, was returning now over the high hill ridges where the pioneers had built their villages and cleared their farms, returning because protective laws had at

last brought back the deer for him to hunt, and even, as we have just seen, a few moose; but returning still more, perhaps, because railroads and trolleys, the opening of the great western farms, the exodus to the cities, have all combined to throw back to wilderness again the hilltop land our forefathers cleared. When the wilderness comes back, the citizens of the wilderness come back as well. Swiftfoot, the wolf, was returning to his own.

But not quite to his own. He had just snuggled down to sleep the next morning, at daybreak, when he was awakened by the report of a gun, far off, then quickly of another nearer him. Like a dog, he was wide awake and on his feet in a second, every sense alert. It was the first Monday in December, the beginning of " deer week," when, for six days, deer can be hunted in Massachusetts, but only with shotguns and without dogs. It was for the baying of dogs that Swiftfoot listened first. Hearing nothing, nor scenting men near by, he was about to creep deeper into his lair, when he caught both the scent and sound of a deer. It was running as fast as it could,

with blood flowing from its side, and it went past Swiftfoot without being aware of him, eyes bloodshot, chest heaving, a pitiful sight. Swiftfoot, however, did not pity it. He trotted into its trail and loped easily after it. There was no great hurry,—it couldn't last long, and he could pull it down when it was too exhausted to fight.

After a mile or so, the deer did fall, weak from loss of blood, and Swiftfoot was upon it. He scarcely had it well by the throat, however, before he got the scent of his deadly enemies, the two-legged creatures, drawing near. With an angry snarl, he slunk quickly into the underbrush.

When the men came up, he could hear their strange noises, though he could not know they were cursing the dog which had torn their game. If Swiftfoot had known they thought him a dog, his rage might have got the better of his prudence. To him, that was the one unforgivable insult. The men—there were three of them—carried his quarry away, which did not add to his good nature, especially as he had tasted just enough to make him hungry. Instead of going

back to his den, he trotted gloomily toward a high hill he saw to the south, with the guns sounding all around him in the woods, and found a cave into which he crawled till he was in complete darkness. Here he felt safe from the guns

The firing ceased at sunset. It was a cold, clear night. He was hungry, and crept forth. All that night he hunted, in vain, till nearly morning. Not even a rabbit crossed his path. But toward daybreak, from far off, he suddenly heard a familiar sound—familiar yet almost forgotten. It was the honk of a wild goose! Turning abruptly, his gray legs took him swiftly and silently toward the sound, till the smell of water came to him.

And then he came face to face with a high, thick wire fence. The ground was frozen hard, and he could not dig under it. He trotted along it till at last he found a fallen log from which he could leap and clear the wire. One bound, and he was on the other side, and moving once more toward the smell of water.

But he had not gone far when he caught another scent, the pungent, unpleasant scent of

men. Turning, he went back to the fence and made sure of a place where he could leap it from this side in case of need. Then, stealthily, craftily, keeping covered by shrubs and undergrowth, he stalked back, impelled by his hunger, and his curiosity.

It was dawn now. But though he heard distant shots, very far away, there was no gun fired on this side of the wire fence. Once or twice a deer went past him, but he didn't dare give chase, because the men were always somewhere about. Dodging them, keeping them to windward, he finally got near the water—a small pond, half frozen, half open. On the frozen side, inside a wire fence which stretched out over part of the ice, were the wild geese, the very same birds he knew from his early days in the far north. Fat and good they were, too! His mouth watered at the smell of them—but here they came in and out of a strange, box-like structure evidently built by the man creature, and only two hundred yards away, over a knoll, smoke was rising, with that pungent smell which comes from the fires the man creature makes.

Swiftfoot slunk cautiously into the blueberry bushes on the farther shore, and lay down to await the coming of darkness. He had got to have one of those geese! He was hungry, and the thought of them, beside, filled him with memories. All day he lay in his cover, growing hungrier and colder, yet not daring to sleep with more than half an eye, for he was aware of the men creatures around him. At last, as the sun set behind the low evergreens to the west, and twilight stole down through the gray beeches above the goose pen, he saw one, two, three men come from different directions, and move over the ridge toward the thin wood smoke that curled up in the still, cold air like the wraith of a twisted column. He waited five minutes more. No other men creatures appeared. He smelled none. The ice on the pond, covered with a light snow powder, gleamed white. A big gander was walking out over it, behind the wire. Swiftfoot rose, circled the pond swiftly, but keeping well to cover, and came silently down through the gray beech grove, himself the color of the beech trunks, and ghostly in the twilight.

Skirting the fence rapidly and cautiously, he came to a place where a good leap would carry him to the top. Here he clung till he could get a grip with his hind paws, and draw himself up and over. As he dropped to the ground, there was a great flutter and squawking and cackle of ducks and geese. Quickly he sprang out on the ice, straight for the great gander, a fifteen-pound bird, and dove for its throat. The gander, with a loud noise, half rose and tried to escape over the fence, but Swiftfoot had his tail, and pulled him down. Then the bill struck at him, the big wings beat powerfully in his face, and he was busy enough for the next two minutes, before he could finally get that throat into his jaws. He had it at last, he felt the bird's resistance cease, and he started to pull the heavy burden over the ice toward the spot in the fence where he had climbed over. He had, meanwhile, been only vaguely aware of the tremendous uproar in the pen. Indeed, his back had been toward the bank.

Now, as he faced about, the body of the goose dangling from his jaws and trailing on the ice, he suddenly saw the gate of the pen open and a man

creature dash in, armed with one of those shining sticks. Swiftfoot didn't wait to sling his prey over his shoulder, or even to make for the low part of the fence. He dropped the goose and sprang, with a lightning turn, back toward the nearest piece of fence, on the ice, and leaped.

His powerful leg muscles would have taken him over, too, had he been springing from ground. But he leaped from ice, with only an inch of powdery snow on it. His feet slipped as he sprang, and he hit the fence only half-way up, falling down on his back. With a snarl, he righted himself and turned for another dash. But now the man was upon him. He was fairly cornered. All his savagery, all his rage, boiled up. Baring his fangs, with a loud, deep, snarling growl, he sprang full at the man creature, his blazing eyes fixed on the patch of white throat.

But even as he rose, mouth open, the shining stick rose, too. There were two shattering reports, so close they were almost one. The top of Swiftfoot's head was blown clean off. He dropped dead on the snowy ice, close to the goose he had killed, his blood making a black pool in the

gathering darkness. His southward journey had ended.

The gamekeeper of the reservation was rather pale, and trembled a little. When you enter with a shotgun to kill a gray fox in your wild-fowl pen, and are attacked by a hungry timber wolf instead, an animal you never saw before in your life, it is rather disconcerting. But the gamekeeper took the body to his house over the ridge, and he and his two special assistants, called in for that one week to guard against deer poaching, skinned it. Later, he showed the skin to a visitor, who went away and told a newspaper reporter about it.

Then the newspaper told the public how a wolf had been shot in Western Massachusetts, the first one killed in the State, so far as anybody knew, for a century. And the public laughed, and said it was another "newspaper story"; there couldn't be any wolves in Massachusetts. Wolves are exterminated in that part of the world. Which only goes to prove that Hamlet was quite right in his remarks to Horatio.

CHAPTER II

BIG REDDY, STRATEGIST

YOU may talk about environment all you please, and doubtless most you say will be true; but there's a lot in heredity, just the same. There is no question in my mind, for instance, but Big Reddy, the fox who very nearly gave most of our dogs nervous prostration, inherited his humor as well as his fearlessness from his father, who, to my certain knowledge, was a wag; and a good deal of his peculiar cunning and his bravery—for he could be brave as a dog—from his mother. As for "prenatal influences," of course he was born in a den in my sugar grove, not four hundred yards from the barns (and, I might add, the chicken coops), which may have explained his complete ease and comfort near the haunts of men and dogs. I suppose, however, it is only fair to state that my barns are not in a village, but out in the open country, close to the big woods. I don't want you to think Big Reddy

was a gutter snipe, though I verily believe he could have crossed the Fifth Avenue traffic with more skill and nonchalance than some dogs I've seen try it!

But let me go back of Big Reddy to his father, first. A true novelist would begin with his great-grandfather, no doubt; but as this is only a short story, his father is far enough back. Sometime before Big Reddy was born, this parent, who was also a big fox, with a magnificent brush (more heredity, you see), used periodically to raid Zach Corliss's chicken yard. Zach set traps, he bought a dog, he kept one gun by the kitchen door, another in the barn. But the old fox walked past the traps, he outran the dogs, when he couldn't make friends with them, and he kept out of gunshot. Zach was growing pretty desperate when, one day, well after sun up in the morning, too, as he was coming down the lane from shooting at a woodchuck up in the new rye field, whom should he meet, trotting toward him between the stone walls, but the old fox. Aha! he had him cornered! The fox couldn't retreat without going into the barnyard, and there were men there. On

either side was open field or pasture. Zach began to run toward him, so he'd get a shot at close range. The fox saw him and sprang up on the stone wall. On the wall—and Zach will swear to this with his hand on the family Bible—he faced Zach, bared his teeth and laughed. "Laughed right out loud," Zach says. Then, before Zach could raise the gun, he leaped to the farther side. Zach sprang to the wall to fire.

He didn't fire. The old fox had jumped square into the middle of Zach's flock of prize Shropshire sheep, and was stampeding them across the pasture, safe in the middle!

Now Zach understood why he laughed. And maybe you can see where Big Reddy, his son, got his sense of humor.

Big Reddy's mother, too, is not to be ignored. In fact, if it had not been for her bravery, Reddy would never have grown to man's estate a free agent. It was this way. When the boys discovered the den, on the far edge of the sugar bush, they were all for digging the foxes out, for pets. Considering the fact that there was a pile of chicken bones beside the den, I consented. They

dug in from the entrance, one of them holding a big sack constantly open to catch mother fox if she tried to jump out. But she didn't jump, and before long the diggers reached the chamber, and there were three little, round, furry, blinking, frightened foxes, the prettiest pups you ever saw. But no mother. There was fresh earth about, and the hole went on!

"She's digging her way out!" the boys cried, and attacked the new tunnel. The ground was hard and full of roots from the maple trees, so they couldn't dig very rapidly, not so rapidly as the mother moved, for they had to get down two feet to reach her hole.

I saw what she was up to, but said nothing to the boys. They followed her from behind as she swung a loop, and made for the entrance to her old den. The boys realized this at last, and sprang to head her off. But they were too late. Before they could snatch up the bag and get it opened, she suddenly pawed her way frantically through into daylight, one pup—all she could carry—in her mouth, and sprang out. As the dog had been carefully left at home, of course

there was no catching her. Off she went with Big Reddy in her mouth.

"Gee, I ain't sorry!" exclaimed young Bill. "Some pep, she's got!"

The boys took the three other little foxes home, and kept them that summer in an old chicken coop—but that is another story. This is to be the tale of Big Reddy.

Reddy was apparently none the worse for this exciting adventure of his early youth, for he grew rapidly in the warm, dry hole which his father and mother dug in an old, abandoned marble quarry about a mile away, playing all day in the sun before the door, and justifying by his thick fur, his deep chest, his wonderful, snapping, alert eyes, his mother's choice of him out of all her family to save. By August he was learning to hunt, and by the time the leaves fell in the woods and you could see a rabbit far off as well as hear or smell it, Big Reddy was able to shift for himself, which he proceeded to do, learning every foot of the land for several miles around. Both his mother and his father impressed this lesson upon him. The very first secret of success in securing

game or escaping enemies is to know your country. Run your rabbit into a blind alley, run the pursuing dog to a steep hill that will take his wind, or to a brook where he will lose the scent, or to a big, flat rock where you can circle all around, springing off and on again from various points, finally to dash away with a long bound. That leaves the dogs, when they arrive, baying madly round and round the rock, like wound-up toys on a table-top. It's really rather amusing.

Big Reddy was certainly a handsome fellow. His fur was rich and red gold, his legs were coal black, his brush was magnificent, almost sweeping the ground, he had a deep chest, splendid speed, sharp ears that pricked up straight at the slightest interesting sound, and eyes that snapped with intelligence. His ears were so good that if he was crossing a field at night and a mouse squeaked in the grass two hundred feet away—a sound you or I couldn't hear unless we were almost on top of it—he would freeze to a statue, listening, and when he had the exact bearings, he would steal softly, on padded feet, toward the sound, keeping to any cover that was there, and

with the aid now of his keen scent and keen eyes as well as his ears, he would suddenly go up in the air, clear off the ground, and come down with his two front paws on the mouse. A mouse, of course, wasn't more than a mouthful, but it helped, between meals.

It didn't take Reddy long, either, to learn what dogs in his part of the world to fear, what dogs to respect, and what dogs merely to laugh at. He may have made still further distinctions, for all I know, but these three he certainly conveyed by his actions so even a man could see. The only dog in the whole town he really feared was Lucy, a smallish fox hound belonging to a "gentleman farmer" down the road, who occasionally hunted. Lucy came from Kentucky, and she was a thoroughbred in every bone and sinew. She had a nose that knew no other smell when once it was laid to a track. She had a challenging, triumphant, trumpet bay, and she had as much speed as Reddy, on the level at least, and almost as much endurance. Her he undoubtedly feared, and so did every other fox in the region.

Then there were perhaps three or four more

dogs which he respected; that is to say, he ran if they were on his track and used some strategy to get rid of them, while he avoided, so far as possible, letting them get on his track. Two of them were locally bred fox hounds, one was a beagle, one was an Airedale who hunted with the hounds and was a pest because he'd go right into a hole and dig you out—Reddy knew of one case where he did this, and so was careful never to let himself get denned in when this dog was at his heels.

But, as for the rest of our dogs, Big Reddy laughed at them. They were, to him, most certainly a joke. This was especially the case with a big, handsome, valuable collie owned by no less a person than myself. Poor old Barney, he was a show dog, a family pet, an adornment to any rug or any garden, but as a hunter he was foolish, and he had no nose; and Big Reddy knew it. He knew it so well that when he couldn't think of anything else to do, he'd come down to the edge of the woods at twilight, or, still better, at midnight when we were all abed and asleep, and bark, a peculiar, rasping, annoying bark. The collie would leap out of his kennel with an answering

yip, yip, yip, that would have waked the Sleeping Beauty, and go tearing off toward his tormentor. Then Reddy, with a kind of chuckle, would slink up the slope through the laurel, make a wide loop, and while the collie was up on the mountain somewhere, would resume his barking close to the edge of the garden again! Back would come the collie, and the whole operation would be repeated, till Reddy's sense of humor was satisfied or somebody fired a gun. He had an entire and wholesome respect for a gun,—not for a man, mind you, but for a man's gun. If the man didn't have a gun, Reddy didn't hesitate sometimes to follow along behind him, through the woods or even across an open field, out of sheer curiosity to see where he was going. If the man turned, he was behind a tree or a tussock or a bush before you could have clapped eyes on him. Everything in the woods interested Reddy; he thoroughly enjoyed life every minute.

But after Christmas, the first winter of his adult life, a deep snow came, and it grew bitterly cold. Reddy didn't mind the cold so much—he had a warm den under some rocks well up the

mountainside amid the laurel and limestone ledges, and he made two entrances to it through the snow, a direct front door, and a back door, reached by a twenty-foot tunnel. From this den he could work down the slope, under cover of the laurel (in fact, he had a regular little path trodden down in the deep snow) and come sneaking around to the south side of every boulder and pounce on any ruffed grouse or pheasant that might be sheltered there. No, the trouble was that the deep snow, the cold, and the big flight of goshawks from the north had seriously diminished the number of grouse and pheasants, as well as the rabbits. Reddy hated the three great horned owls which had come from the north to the big dead hemlocks on his mountainside and hunted rabbits all night long. He used to yearn for the power to climb a tree and get the great, sleepy fellows when, by day, they were occasionally visible, roosting close to the brown trunks, on a dead limb. Reddy had already raided about all the chicken yards in the neighborhood, and after one, or at most, two raids, he was shrewd enough to know that traps would be set, and men

watching with guns. Clearly, he'd have to abandon his warm, familiar den for a time, and move on to new hunting grounds. So one evening, just after sundown, he started off.

He traveled about twenty miles that night—that is, he reached at dawn a place twenty miles from his starting point—and never got a thing, though he tracked a cottontail a long way, only to find it in a hole between two hemlock roots, too small for him to enter. At dawn, however, he came upon a farm on a back road, well up under a mountainside. He heard the hens and rooster from afar, and slunk up cautiously. No dog barked. The farmer was up, for there was the smell of wood smoke in the air and—yes, he heard it now, the ring of milk in a pail. But that came from the barn. The hens were in a house behind the barn. In front was a high wire fence. Big Reddy, from behind a bush, studied the situation. The hen-house roof sloped down behind, and he could jump to it from the snow. But how about the other side? How would he get out again? He sneaked a little farther around, till he could see into the yard, a look of crafty satisfaction

spread over his face, he listened sharply a moment, sniffed, went back to the rear, and sprang on the roof. A second later he landed with all fours on a fat Rhode Island Red, got his teeth into its neck while the rest of the fowls flapped wildly about and set up an alarmed cackling, and with a yank of his head flung the body over his shoulder and went up a broken ladder which leaned against the hen-house, left there by the farmer after he patched the shingles in the autumn. Reddy was down on the snow again and well away toward the woods when he heard the farmer behind him, shouting in the pen. He laid the hen down and bit its neck again, softly, to make sure it was dead. Looking back, he saw the farmer coming on his tracks now, followed by a boy with a gun. Reddy slung the heavy fowl over his shoulder once more and started rapidly off. He had cover for a few feet, but then had to make a break across the open. There came a cry, a report, the ping of shot near him, but he was untouched, and a second later the woods wrapped him. Up and up he went, over rocks and through dense laurel, till he came at last to a

cosy little cave under an overhang on a southern exposure. Here he dropped his burden, investigated carefully, found no odor of wildcat, and dragging in his game, sat down to a square meal. After that he curled up in a ball and slept.

How long he had slept he didn't know. It seemed but a few moments, for he was weary with his night's tramp over the deep snow, when he was roused by the baying of hounds. His ears were instantly up, and he was out in front of his den, listening. The sound came nearer. There were one, two, hounds, and two other dogs. Yes, they were undoubtedly on his trail. Reddy cast his eyes around deliberately and his eyes narrowed in thought. He was in a strange country, so they had him at a certain disadvantage. No doubt that same farmer and the boy with the gun —perhaps more men with guns now—would be behind the hounds, waiting for them to run him into view. He didn't propose to be run into view. He thought of the first principle his parents had taught him, and, making sure he had time for the manœuvre, he sprang straight up the ledges above his den for two hundred yards, then

returned in his own tracks to the den again, took a long leap out and downward to one side, so he cleared twenty feet or more before he landed, and then trotted deliberately off along the mountain-side, keeping always in the most tangled laurel. He heard the dogs presently, baying and yipping excitedly above the den, where he had turned back in his tracks, and grinned to himself.

Reddy had no intention of getting wearied, so he moved at a quiet trot. It was some time before his ears told him the dogs had picked up his real trail again, and would be hot at his heels in a moment. He lengthened his stride and once more turned up the mountain, at a steep incline, meanwhile looking sharply about for strategic aids. The dogs were nearing him again, their barks showing signs of short windedness, when Big Reddy suddenly saw something that made him increase his speed. It was a white, gleaming slide, on an extremely steep pitch of slope, perhaps two hundred feet long and twenty feet wide. On either side was a tangle of laurel and broken tree trunks. The snow on the slide had been crusted with water from some spring above, and

was almost glare ice. But at the bottom was a big snow-drift. Reddy sprang to this drift, and tried the slide. He slipped back, unable to climb it. But by making a huge spring, he could reach a bit of projecting rock eight feet up, and from there leap to the side. This he did, climbed to the top, and sat down on his haunches, behind a tree, where he could peek out at the dogs coming up from below. They reached the snow-drift, and there, of course, lost the trail. Presently, however, one of the hounds found it again, at the point where Reddy had landed after his spring from the rock, and up they all came, panting through the tangled laurel and over the fallen trees. Reddy waited quite calmly, till they were almost on him. Then he sprang out before their astonished eyes and crouching on all fours, slipped over the icy lip of the slide and tobogganed like a shot to the bottom. From the drift below he looked up to see the four dogs, barking madly, trying their front paws on the slippery rim, and pulling back in terror. Reddy waited, quite calm. A second later the four dogs were in full cry after him, coming down through the

tangle at the side. When they were at the bottom, he leaped to the rock, to the bank above them, and went up the side to the top again. The dogs had to turn and once more pant up after him. A second time he slid down, a second time they followed, scrambling over the logs at the side. A third and a fourth time this was repeated, each time Reddy having plenty of chance to get his wind at the top, but the dogs having no chance at all.

They were well fagged by the end of Reddy's fifth slide, and he suddenly saw that only three of them were following him down. Whether that was because the fourth dog was too winded, or had suddenly learned sense, Reddy didn't know. Anyhow, that particular sport was up. He sprang out along the mountain at top speed, ran for half a mile as fast as he could go, turned up the slope again, then, still at top speed, reached the bare, wind-swept ledges on the very top of the mountain, ran back and forth over a bare ledge three or four times, sprang far off through the air, and trotted down on the other side.

Then, panting, he sat down and listened. There was no sound, even to his keen ears! The dogs had given up the chase. Reddy hunted out a warm hole in an old fallen log, and finished his nap. To tell the truth, he was rather pleased with himself.

A few nights later, having found poor hunting elsewhere and being hungry, he was impelled to go back over the ridge and have another try at that same chicken yard, especially as he now felt confident of being able to outwit and outrun the dogs. Besides, those dogs didn't live at that farm, he felt sure. They had been brought in by the farmer. Reddy may have seemed reckless, but he really never was. He was merely self-confident. He never relaxed his alertness for a second.

Now, as he drew near the farm, from the rear, he was suddenly aware of man tracks, and the smell of meat. Investigating, he detected the presence of a bone, buried under the snow beside the path he had taken when he carried off the hen. Very carefully he walked all around the spot, and there was no smell at all there but meat. He thrust in

a paw, two paws, dug quickly, and two feet below the surface unearthed a nice ham bone. There was no need of running further risks. The bone in his mouth, he trotted back up the slope.

The next night he thought he'd see if there was any such luck again. Sure enough, in the very same place, he smelled more meat! This time it was a chunk of lamb bones, with good, warming fat on them, too! Reddy was delighted. He returned a third, a fourth, a fifth night, and each trip was rewarded. His belly was getting quite rotund, and he slept heavily all day long. On the sixth night, however, as his nose sniffed the magic snow-drift, his eyes went narrow, and he didn't dig. Around and around the spot he trotted, and down the man track toward the house, where he discovered the ladder had been removed from the coop, then back to sniff again. There was meat under the snow, all right, but there was something else, too, he couldn't quite tell what at first. Then it came to him; he'd encountered it once or twice near a barn—it was rusty iron. What was rusty iron doing there? Yes, and a man's fingers had touched it. Reddy

suddenly remembered a fox he'd seen caught in a trap—that was made of rusty iron, too. He turned tail and trotted away. It was better to have four sound legs than one full belly!

This bit of wisdom on Reddy's part gave him quite a reputation in those parts, and the next day another hunt was organized, and he was wakened once more by the hounds on his trail. Well, he'd had about enough of this particular neighborhood. He didn't like it as well, anyhow, as the land of his birth. Maybe there was good hunting at home again now. Besides, he'd been thinking of late about a certain girl fox back there, and it filled him with funny feelings. Reddy rose, shook off the sleep, and without further ado headed for home as fast as his legs would carry him. That was so fast that he had no need of strategy until, after four miles, he had to come down into open country. Here, if the hounds weren't to run him into somebody's gun, he needed to throw them off. He cast about for a way, smelled water, made toward it, and found a small river half frozen over. Running out on the thin ice, he trotted cautiously along till his

sure eye told him he could make the leap to ice that would bear up his few pounds, on the other side. Then he jumped. After that he trotted south again much more leisurely, crossed the river once more at a bridge, and never heard more from the dogs.

It was one clear, starlit night in February, when Reddy was roaming the woods, restless he knew not quite why, that he heard a curious fox bark not far away. It was the bark of Whitetip, the she-fox he had been thinking about. It seemed to call him. He answered with a blood-curdling yell that would have done credit to a panther (and was, indeed, thought to be a wildcat by the people it woke up in a house by the edge of the woods a quarter of a mile away), and leaped into a bounding gallop. His tracks converged upon Whitetip's. As their paths met, they both dropped to a trot, side by side, with little whines and barks into each other's ears. Thus they trotted on, courting, over the snow, under the leafless trees and the cold stars, till Whitetip, coy at first, was won.

Dawn was coming when, still side by side, they

AS THEIR PATHS MET, THEY BOTH DROPPED TO A TROT, SIDE BY SIDE

continued their trot in among the rock ledges of a hillock in the woods. Here Reddy knew of a spot where sun and leaves protected the ground from frost, and he could dig. He set at once to work, and far quicker than you would have thought possible a hole went in under a stone, far in to a little warm, safe, snug chamber. Side by side he and Whitetip curled down together. The funny, restless feeling had gone. He was filled with a great content. He slept.

The next few months of Reddy's life were filled full with the routine of domestic cares and responsibilities. He was a kind father, a loving husband, and a good provider, though it required no little effort to feed his voracious family. During the warm season, however, when his fur was light, he had less to fear from traps and hunters, and there was more game to be had. He and Whitetip certainly raised a fine litter, and at last saw them shifting for themselves.

After that, Reddy felt as if he had earned a vacation. It wasn't that his affections had gone wandering, that he was fickle—not at all. But there was a sudden charm about bachelor free-

dom; doubtless you know how it is! The upshot was that he drifted off again by himself for a while, and had a little den a mile or so from the recent family home. He was here when the winter snows came, and living rather a solitary life, finding his chief amusement in running European hares, which had suddenly appeared that winter in large numbers, coming over from a neighboring State—great, swift, long-legged and long-eared creatures like our western jack-rabbits. He also kept in practice leading dogs astray, and made several successful chicken raids.

It was midwinter sometime that he was startled early one morning by the sound of a gun, and presently detected sounds of distress. Galloping swiftly toward the sound, he found poor Whitetip with one hind foot crippled and torn with shot, and bleeding. She was hobbling along on three legs, trying to reach her den. When she saw Reddy, she gave a little moan of greeting, and sank in the snow, half exhausted, while he licked her paw.

But he had scarcely got the clotted, frozen blood off before they both heard a deep, warning

bay. It was Lucy, the one hound they dreaded! The den was two miles or more away! And Whitetip had only three legs to run on!

She struggled bravely to her feet, and hobbled on as rapidly as she could behind her mate, while he made his plans. It was plain Lucy was on Whitetip's trail. How to get her off was the problem. At the head of an open pasture slope Reddy stopped, just behind a big boulder which concealed both foxes from the view of anything following them. Lucy was now not more than three hundred yards behind. He sent Whitetip on up into the scrub, and waited.

On came Lucy, working in her own wonderful way, burying her muzzle up to the eyes in the snow for a step or two, then emerging to emit a deep, trumpet bay, then down again in the scent, and never stopping her steady progress. Reddy waited till she was within fifteen feet of the boulder, then he suddenly stepped out directly in front of her, so that she could not help seeing him. Out of the snow came her muzzle, out of her mouth came a silver challenge, and at him she sprang. He was away like a shot, at an oblique

angle from the course his mate had taken, with the hound in mad pursuit. Now she had him in sight, the dog could let out every notch of her wonderful speed, and Reddy knew he'd have to run as he never ran before. For a mile or more he kept in open fields, on the level, so he would be in full view, and was hard put to keep a safe lead. Finally, as his wind began to fail, he cut up a sharp pitch, into timber, and kept on up till he felt the dog drop back and lose sight of him—as he could tell by her bay. Then he doubled around on a loop, reached his old track, and raced back in it for some distance. Then he took to cover, and made for his starting point as fast as he could go.

Behind the same boulder, he once more waited Lucy's coming, lying down to get all his wind back possible. He well knew she would return to this spot anyway, if he threw her off his scent, and the only safe thing was for him to be here again, lest she pick up the other track, and run down Whitetip before she could den in. Sure enough, Lucy, only temporarily delayed, was on his scent once more, and coming on fast, her mel-

low bay resounding over the winter fields. As she came up on the other side of the boulder, Reddy sprang to the top of it, where she did not see him, because her muzzle was in the snow. He watched her every move with narrowed eyes. Where he and Whitetip had stood, she stopped, and sent out a perplexed, resounding bay or two. Then, as he feared, she picked up her original trail, and turned up Whitetip's track.

Reddy made a tremendous spring, right over her head, his hind feet almost grazing her ears as he came down, and before her astonished eyes he actually turned his head and looked at her! This was too much for any dog! With a tremendous enraged uproar she was after him again.

Once more Reddy shot off at a tangent to his mate's track, and leaped down the slope, over the snowy fields. He had very little lead, and he badly needed more. There was no thin ice anywhere near by, and no hill except that up which Whitetip had gone. But half a mile away was a road, packed hard by sleighs, and perhaps confusing to the scent. At any rate, it led to possibilities, if he could increase his lead sufficiently.

Reddy was four hundred feet to the good at the road, thanks to the snow, which held him up better than the dog, and to his brief rest. He leaped a stone wall on the farther side, ran out a hundred feet and back again, and crouched down close. Over the wall sprang Lucy, and out on his track. Like light he was up and over into the road again, while the hound bayed her perplexity at the dead end of his track. He made up the road, hidden by the wall, and was out of sight around a bend before the dog was once more on his trail.

Far up the road just passing around the next bend, Reddy saw an empty lumber sledge, jangling along at a trot, the driver, of course, with his back to the rear end. Reddy leaped ahead with redoubled energy. As he caught up to the sled, he made a long, light spring, and landed silently upon it. The driver never heard him. Crouching down, one eye on the driver, one on the road behind, he could see Lucy come into sight around the bend, and then suddenly lose the track. She emitted again her bay of perplexity, which Reddy surely thought would attract the

driver's notice. But he paid no attention at first. Human ears are poor things, anyway. At last, however, he did turn slowly around, for a gust of wind brought the hound's deep call with sudden added loudness. Reddy was still crouched low, but all his legs were poised for action, and one eye never left the two-footed enemy.

The man saw him, his mouth opened, sounds came forth, that resembled very much, "Well, I'll be damned!" Then he reached for one of the sticks that stood at the side of his sled to hold the wood in. Reddy didn't wait. He was off the sled and over the wall before the man could even stop his horses. He heard the man calling loudly to Lucy now, but Lucy wasn't his dog, and paid no attention, even if she heard him against the wind. She was busy trying to puzzle out the mystery of that vanished scent.

Now, at last, Reddy grinned, a broad, pleased, amiable grin, and trotted leisurely to the woods, and then made directly for Whitetip's den, which he felt sure she had reached by now. He still heard Lucy's perplexed bay as he crested the ridge.

Whitetip lay in the den, licking her injured paw. Again she gave a little whining moan when Big Reddy entered. He lay down beside her and applied his warm tongue. She was his mate. She was hurt. He had just saved her life. Why had he saved her life? He could hardly have told you that, but he knew the time was drawing on when the snow would soften, the wind at night would pull in from the south, and that strange, powerful feeling would come over him. He slept the rest of that day by her side. At night he went out. The stars were hidden. A south wind was soughing through the pines. There was a peculiar smell in the air. The snow was a little damp. Reddy tipped up his head and emitted a long-drawn scream that would have done credit to a panther. It was a warning to all in the woods that his mate lay there, in the den, and he, Big Reddy, was prepared to defend her. Then, because she was injured, he went forth into the dark, to get her meat. It was a characteristic touch that he headed for the chicken coops of Lucy's master.

CHAPTER III

THE ODYSSEY OF OLD BILL

OLD BILL, the biggest bull moose in Massachusetts (and perhaps you will be surprised to hear that there are any moose in Massachusetts —most people are), was born in ignominious captivity. I say ignominious, because it is ignominious for any wild animal to be a captive, and especially for so splendid an animal as the moose, that great, deep-chested, powerful-limbed, mighty-antlered survival of some giant race of deer which inhabited the globe before the dawn of any history we know, doubtless before the advent of Man at all. And yet, if Old Bill's parents hadn't been led away into captivity in Massachusetts there would now be no moose in that State, so there you are.

A moose does not take kindly to confinement. You may give him everything in the world he likes to eat, from rolled oats to spruce bark, but

if he is shut up in a few acres, he presently dies of a disease with a learned name, which in plain language is indigestion. In his wild state he roams thirty miles to get a meal, browsing here and there, and thus keeps in condition. But the rich man who caused Old Bill's potential parents to be captured had more than a few acres to confine them in. He owned 14,000 acres of forest and mountain just across the valley of the Housatonic River from Lenox, up in the Berkshire Hills. On a preserve of 14,000 acres you can take quite a stroll, even if you have the legs of a moose. This same rich man—he was a very rich man indeed—wiped out all the farms which had once made clearings on his 14,000 acres, leaving only one or two houses for his gamekeepers to live in, and building a "lodge" for himself, though he never hunted the moose, and infrequently even fished the brooks. Then he built a great fence all around his property. High up on the mountain at the centre of the reservation was a deep swamp of spruce and hemlock and alder, with a pond in the midst for which you might hunt hours in vain. It was ideal moose country. Into this

swamp plunged the old bulls and several cows which comprised the captive herd. The elk, or wapiti deer, were tamer, and used to hang around the gamekeeper's house, like cows. Not so the moose. They made for the deep swamp, and finding plenty to eat and plenty of room to roam, they escaped the fatal indigestion, and presently into the world came a gawky, stiff-legged thing, with a hump on his back and a tassel under his chin, who was destined to be our hero.

It must be admitted that his father paid very little attention to him, but his mother was extremely proud, and gave him the best of care, teaching him, as soon as he was old enough, how to spring into thickets that concealed at the approach of danger, how to nibble a bit of fresh moosewood twig and then trot on maybe a mile before reaching up and with pendulant upper lip drawing down and into the mouth a cluster of succulent hemlock, never eating too much in one place lest one get lazy, with flabby muscles and poor digestion. She taught him too, by example, to sniff the wind before lying down to rest or even before feeding, to sniff strange tracks in the earth

or the snow, to be ever alert, watchful, ready. His was the Boy Scout motto—" Be prepared." If she had been rearing him in the deep woods, far from mankind, he would have learned, no doubt, to flee from the smell of a man on the wind, or even from a man's tracks in the mud—to flee, perhaps, miles and miles to another forest. But here on the Berkshire reservation a few men—the keeper, his assistants, the owner and his friends—were always passing about, and no harm came from them. Indeed, in winter when the snow was very deep, the men would come into the swamp dragging loads of hay on a sled, and leave it there for the moose to eat. Besides, there was no way to flee very far, because of the great fence. So Old Bill (of course, he wasn't called Old Bill then, nor even Willie) was never taught to flee actively from man, nor greatly to dread him—only to be cautious and slip into cover when the man scent came down wind.

But one day strange things began to happen, alarming things. Many men—strange men—appeared on the reservation, and many and strange horses, and there was running and shout-

ing and beating of the bush and woods, while frightened animals of all sorts, deer, elk, moose, and all the rest, were driven in toward the central enclosure. None of them knew why, though the reason was that the rich man had died, as even very rich men have to do, and now all the captive animals were going to be rounded up and carried away to another rich man's reservation. The moose, because by nature they are the wariest and craftiest of all big animals, perhaps, though you might suppose they would find it hardest to conceal themselves, were the most difficult to round up. Old Bill's mother, especially, with the care of her child on her mind, was tremendously alarmed, and kept dashing into low, dense spruce thickets with a warning bellow to Bill to follow her, which he always did, with more speed than grace. As they dashed over the mountain and through the swamps and forest, always seeking to avoid the scent of danger, they encountered Bill's father and another cow, employing successfully the same tactics. The four of them kept together after that, and presently they were roused suddenly from the bushes on the bank of a swampy

brook by the warning noise of the beaters some distance off. The old bull led the way with a tremendous leap into the thickets, away from the noise, and brought them up sharp against the eighteen-foot-high wire fence. The bull, in fact, was going at such a gait, and was so excited with alarm, that his horns actually collided with it, and it sagged away from him. As it gave before the impact of his great body (his antlers alone probably weighed fifty pounds or more), there was a crashing noise, as of wood breaking. The bull pulled back, and looked. Yes, one of the chestnut posts which held the fence up had rotted, and cracked at the ground! He drew back with a short, sharp snort, and then went into the fence again, deliberately this time, and close to the post. It gave completely, and the post sagged so far out that the top of the fence was only six feet above the ground. Once more the bull drew back, gathered his great muscles for the spring, and cleared it. The second cow followed, and then Bill's mother, with a kind of tooting noise which Bill knew meant, "Come on!" gathered herself and sprang.

Poor little Bill uttered a protesting bellow, or rather two bellows, like two raps with an ax on a hollow tree. *He* couldn't make that jump. He just knew he couldn't. He ran up and down behind the half-fallen fence, looking for a lower place, and seeing his father, the other cow, even his mother, vanishing into the woods outside. Yes, even his mother, she felt so sure he would follow! But he *couldn't* follow! If Bill had been a boy, he would certainly have burst into sobs. But he wasn't. He was a young bull moose, and behind him, on the wind, he suddenly caught fresh and strong that man scent his mother had taught him to be wary of. It was coming nearer. Over there, his mother was going farther away. Little Bill drew back, made a mighty dash and a spring with all the power of his gawky, stiff, long legs, and though his hind heels hit the wire and half spilled him, he staggered up to find, to his surprise, that he was over the fence! Then he kicked up those same hind hoofs with a prance of joy and pride in his achievement, and dashed madly off on the trail of his parents.

His achievement had given him such a good opinion of himself, in fact, that he didn't even whimper when he couldn't seem to catch the others, but only redoubled his efforts, ducking his head craftily under low branches and dashing on with astonishing speed. At last he did catch sight of them, ahead in an open glade in the woods, and with a final prance and kick of delight he ran panting up to his mother. His father was evidently satisfied that they were at least temporarily safe here, for he was nibbling some hemlock shoots. Not long after, however, they moved on, going down a rough, wooded slope of the mountain.

At the bottom of this slope they came suddenly upon a strange thing, with a yet stranger odor—a kind of roadway (they were familiar with roadways), but with eight shining steel strips nailed to it, upon wooden crossbars. With a snort, the bull turned tail and began to climb the slope again, the rest after him. They had gone but a few feet, however, when a tremendous noise smote their ears, and turning to see the cause, they beheld a terrible monster coming down this

strange road, belching smoke. They all sprang higher up the ledges, and beneath them the 20th Century Limited (the Boston and Albany section) thundered by. Men and women were sitting at the windows of the parlor cars, in great easy chairs, hurtling luxuriously through the landscape. But they did not see the four wild creatures bounding up the rocks above, their nostrils stung with the acrid coal smoke smell, their eyes big with alarm.

Yet the strange monster had not hurt them, apparently it had not tried to hurt them. It had stayed right on that shining roadway. Even little Bill realized this. It was their first lesson in the new freedom.

However, it takes more than one lesson to teach a cosmic truth even to so clever an animal as a moose, and Bill's father, the leader, was still wary. He did his best to keep his little herd to the cover of the woods. The trouble was, they were always getting out of the cover of the woods, and never knowing when it was going to happen, either. In the next few days they stumbled on roads, on houses, on odd animals which they didn't

in the least fear, which men call cows, and once they were chased by a dog. It was Little Bill that the dog really chased. Bill had dropped behind the rest a little, to feed on a succulent young birch tree, for his appetite was good these days; he was a growing boy. The dog, a huge mongrel creature which he, of course, supposed was one of those wolves his mother had told him of, came suddenly at him, and he quite naturally bolted for the maternal protection. It chanced that the little herd was to the windward, with a half gale blowing, and they didn't get the dog scent. Into the swampy glade where they stood Bill burst without warning, the dog in full pursuit, and just as Bill broke into their midst, the dog fastened on his rear leg. Bill turned about, with a snort of pain, trying to reach the dog with his bare little forehead. But there was no need of that. Bill's father stepped into the breach. With lowered head and eyes that blazed, he made one lunge, one toss of his great, strong neck, and impaled on his pronged antlers the dog was torn with a wild cry from his grip on Bill, and then tossed into the air. Even as he fell, the antlers

again struck him, and when he reached the ground a great, sharp hoof went crashing through his chest. Then the old bull, with a short snort, led the way rapidly into the deeper woods, Bill limping along behind. When they paused again, Bill's mother licked his wounds, and he lay down stiffly to sleep that night, wishing he, too, had big, powerful antlers.

Their escape together from the reservation, and their subsequent wanderings, in the face daily of the unknown, of threatening, strange perils, always searching for some way out of the ring of roads, houses, clearings, which seemed to hem them in, had kept the tiny herd together, just as common danger keeps men and women together. Yet the worst peril they had actually faced was a dog, which the old bull feared no more than an insect, and gradually the fear of danger left them, and Bill's father wandered away by himself, after the manner of his kind, looking no doubt for male companionship, while Bill, though tempted to go with him, still clung to his mother, who, in turn, browsed with the other cow. Thus the days passed, while Little

Bill grew and grew till his forehead began to itch and he rubbed it on trees, thus making the joyous discovery that his antlers were growing! It was not until autumn that he saw his father again.

He well remembered the night. It was twilight, fast deepening into dusk, when his mother stood up suddenly on the shore of a lonesome pond, where the summer campers had departed from their cottages in the woods, and elevating her head emitted a long-drawn, strange call. It echoed faintly, and again yet more faintly, from the woods on the farther banks. Twice, three times, four times, she repeated it, and a little farther along the shore the other cow took it up. Bill had never heard his mother make this noise before, and he listened full of wonder.

It seemed a long time after that his sharp ears heard a sound like two blows struck on a tree across the lake, or like a double cough, and then the unmistakable swish of something large entering water, and swimming. This watery swish came nearer. Bill heard now the panting of breath. His mother called once more, excitedly.

The breathing grew louder, the swish more rapid. A few minutes later, across the dim surface of the lake, Bill saw the great, palmated antlers of a bull moose, rising above the ripples, and just below them, nose almost in the water, the splendid head. The bull reached bottom with his feet. He began to struggle faster. Then he got to knee depth, shook himself, and came, like a great, black ghost risen from the deep, splashing up to the shore. That was how Bill saw his father again, and how he learned the meaning of the cow moose call, the call that brings the fathers back to the herds.

After that, the bull stayed with them again, as the first snow came, and they continued their wanderings, still looking for some escape into deeper woods where men and roads and other strange things did not annoy. So far, guns, however, were not in their experience of terrors. But now, all suddenly, as they woke one morning and set out to browse through a young second growth hard wood, they ran full into a party of three men whose presence they had not scented because of the direction of the strong wind. The bull saw

the men before he was seen, and turning, with a swish of his antlers under the branches, made for shelter. Bill was right after him, for by now he was big and swift, too. Bill's mother turned, also, but before the second cow could get into cover there were three terrific noises behind them, and even as he looked back from a corner of his eye to see the cow fall headlong, Bill heard a strange whistle in the air around him and a terrifying ripping in the foliage. He put on even more speed, and soon the three of them were out of danger. But they were only three now. They waited for the other cow, but she did not come, and presently the bull led the way, with long strides, back toward the reservation. They had never been shot at there. It was all he could think of as a means of escape.

They reached the reservation fence in a few hours, driven on by the sound of guns in the woods about them, and discovered the spot where they had jumped it a few months before. It had not been repaired. In fact, two more parts had now sagged over so far that they could step across with their long legs, back into the familiar spruce

swamps. Here they had never been molested, and here there was no sound of the terrifying guns, except from a great distance. They looked for the other moose who used to be there, the elk, the deer, but none appeared, except a white-tailed deer or two who were not familiar, and two elk, who, like them, had escaped the round-up. The three moose retreated to their old browsing grounds by the pond, where, a day or two later, the one keeper who still lived on in the white farmhouse discovered their tracks. But it was too late now to try to catch them and ship them away. Instead, he smiled to himself, and got his sled out to be ready with hay when the deep snows came.

Meanwhile, something had happened to the three men who had killed the cow moose. Bill and his parents knew nothing about this, but all the other hunters heard of it. The State game warden for the district, Bill Snyder, on his rounds through the forests, had come upon these men, red handed, as they were trying to get their booty out. As moose are absolutely protected in Massachusetts, Bill hauled them into court, and

the judge gave them each a fine which was far larger than the value of the moose. It was so large that it quite effectively discouraged any other hunter from wanting to take a chance on a moose. It made the three remaining animals comparatively safe from rifles for some time to come. The warden's friends began to speak of the moose as " Bill's pets." And now, perhaps, you begin to see how our hero came, later, to get his name of Old Bill. The countryside christened him that, in honor of Bill Snyder.

Bill Snyder himself came up on the reservation that first winter, to see the moose, and to help feed them after the big blizzard. Little Bill, hidden in a thicket, saw him pulling a sled load of hay. He was a big, smiling man, and somehow Bill wasn't afraid. He was alone at the time, and in his eagerness to get the hay, he moved in his cover before the man had gone far away, and Snyder caught a sight of him. The smile on his face grew broader.

Spring came with no adventures to Bill's credit except another tussle with a stray dog, which evidently mistook Bill for a deer and ran him

into a corner of the old fence, where Bill was forced to turn and fight. He was alone, but found himself already equal to the emergency. He finished off that dog in two tosses and a stamp, but tossed him a couple more times just for the fun of it, because it felt so good. As a rule, his temper was of the best, but nobody likes a dog that chases you. In spring, too, another little moose was added to the herd, making their number four again, and Bill's mother quite forsook him, for the care of her new offspring. So then, at last, Bill cut away entirely from the maternal apron strings, as it were, and went wandering off with the old bull, quite a little man now, and left the females (the new arrival was a female) to themselves.

Having been quite unmolested all winter again, the fear had left them, and once more now they wandered out of the old reservation, where that winter they had pretty well used up the tenderest feed, over a fence falling still more into decay, and into the free woods and wilder uplands. They met men, but nobody fired at them. They crossed roads and even browsed into rye and oat

fields near houses, at night, but no harm befell them. Still, they were ever cautious, and kept deep out of sight except on the rare occasions when the man scent had not reached them in time. Crossing everywhere so many man tracks, however, gradually broke down a good deal of their instinctive shyness. Bill came to know the country for many miles around, and more than once it was only the greater caution of the older bull which kept him from following the promptings of his native bump of curiosity and exposing himself to plain view.

That year Bill and his father were in a deep swamp, quietly browsing, when far, far off they heard the cow call, which, a year before, had startled Bill's ears as his mother sounded it beside the lake. Now it stirred him curiously. His muscles tightened, he raised his head and coughed loudly, he drew his forefeet from the mud, and started for the firmer land. But the old bull was ahead of him. As Bill came up to the open woods on the bank, intent on rushing toward the call, he saw the bull face round upon him, with lowered antlers. Bill was surprised

and a little frightened. But he was angry, too. His nostrils expanded, for an instant he saw red, and lowering his own smaller antlers, which were still mere prongs, with only a suggestion of the palm formation, he charged full at the older animal, who met his rush with another. The result was inevitable. The stronger, heavier bull knocked the smaller one back down the bank, where poor Bill was content to remain, seeing his father turn and with long, powerful strides and a great swish as his triumphant antlers swept the foliage, disappear toward the far-off call.

Presently Bill rose and followed deliberately. He was young. He had plenty of time. Some day *his* antlers would spread sixty inches, and then ——

But it was not the next year, nor the next, nor even the next. Three years passed when Bill did not challenge his father's supremacy. But he grew—he grew in stature, and he grew in boldness. Perhaps because he was born with such a hump of curiosity, and a sense of humor, too, Bill in his summer wanderings practiced less and less sly concealment, till many people in the up-

land hamlets and farms and even a few in the valleys came to know him by sight, and because he was now so large, and Bill Snyder's pet boast, he was universally called Old Bill. When anybody saw him, he would call up Snyder on the telephone, and tell the place and hour. Snyder kept these records, and that was how he knew that on some days Old Bill would travel as much as thirty-five miles—that is, he was reported from points thirty-five miles apart; he probably actually covered considerably more ground. As he came to fear man less and less, Old Bill grew more and more bold, and, a north woodsman would say, less and less moose-like. One of his favorite tricks, when he happened to be crossing some back roadway up in the hill country and chanced to hear or scent humans approaching, was to stop in his tracks, head erect, antlers spreading into the air, and look toward the sound or scent. Presently, perhaps, around the bend in the road would come a man in a wagon, or two women on foot. If it was the former, the horse would probably get up on his hind legs, or start backing, much to the discomforture of the driver,

which amused Bill greatly. If the horse showed a proper degree of alarm, he would often take a step or two forward, tossing his great antlers, and then watch the driver try to turn around and go the other way. If it was foot passengers he met, he would raise one front hoof and paw the ground, whereupon the humans would turn and start rapidly in the opposite direction. Then Bill would *clump*-clump, *clump*-clump after them a way, to hear them scream. But if they happened to be wise, and didn't run from him, but stooped as if to pick up a stone, he would leap the roadside wall with a great bound, and trot away.

Old Bill spent a good bit of his time on the former reservation, especially in winter, for then Bill Snyder put out hay, when the snow was deep, for him and for the dozen or more other moose that now composed the herd, and there in deer season, when the guns popped, he was safe from annoyance. However, it took some vigilance to keep the reservation free of poachers, and one autumn Bill Snyder was asked by the owner to secure a special deputy for the shooting season.

Snyder bethought him of Tim Coakley, star first baseman of the only professional team in the county, who was just then loafing. Tim was six foot one, tough as hickory, and reputed to be afraid neither of man nor devil.

" Sure," said Tim, " Oi'll come. The guy that mistakes me for a deer'll go to his own funeral."

So, on the day before the season opened, Snyder led Tim up the mountain, and then took him out into the deep cover to show him the likely places to watch. But Snyder had a sneaking idea that Old Bill and some of the other moose might be around, so he left Tim in a little clearing, and went on, alone, into the densest part of the swamp to see if he could get a peep at them, his pets and pride. He hadn't gone very far before he heard the voice of Tim calling frantically. Snyder turned and hurried back. As he drew nearer, he heard not only his own name, but various and sundry adjectives attached thereto which are not proper for publication. The voice seemed to be coming, also, from a greater height above the ground than even the normal position of Tim's mouth.

Peering through the bushes, Snyder beheld the giant first baseman of the Berkshire Tigers, the dauntless hero who feared neither man nor devil, astraddle the limb of a chestnut tree, which he grasped with his arms as though it were his long-lost sweetheart, while below him, horns almost touching his dangling boots, stood Old Bill, coughing and pawing the ground, and lowering and then tossing up his fifty pounds or more of pronged antlers.

Snyder emerged from the bushes, shouting with laughter. Tim saw him and redoubled his stream of adjectives.

"Hi, call off your blasted pet poodle," he shouted. "You'll fine me two hundred and fifty dollars if Oi shoot him, and he'll kill me if Oi don't, so's it'll cost me three hundred dollars for me funeral. Where do Oi get off, you blasted old ——"

"Whoa, son!" Snyder laughed. "You don't get off, apparently."

"Say, this limb's gettin' sharp, Oi tell you. Shoot the darn thing, quick, or Oi'll *fall* off."

"Shoot a tame moose!" cried Snyder.

"Tame, your grandmother! Oh, yes, he's real tame, *he* is. He's a dear little, gentle, tame darlin', Oi *don't* think!"

Meanwhile Old Bill kept on pawing the ground and coughing and tossing his great antlers. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. So was Snyder. Tim was a suffering minority of one.

"Well," the warden remarked, after a moment more, "to stop your swearing, and save your soul from perdition, Tim, here goes."

He kicked up the mould, found a stone, and tossed it at Old Bill, who suddenly sprang half sideways six or eight feet and vanished like smoke into the dense brush.

Tim came down.

He rubbed his legs, he felt of himself as if to make sure he was all there. Then a look of extreme sheepishness spread over his face.

"Say, Bill, for the love o' Mike, don't let this get out!" he said.

"I won't tell," Snyder answered, "but you can't trust Old Bill—he does love a joke."

It was at the approach of the rutting season the next year that Old Bill pulled off his most

spectacular stunt. No human could explain just why he did it, and probably Bill couldn't himself. He had been getting more and more restless for several days, wandering far afield from the home browsing on the reservation, and mulling over what he at last knew was the approach of the great crisis, when he would seriously challenge the old bull, his father, for the supremacy of the herd. Twice, now, he had challenged, once as a mere boy of eighteen months, once as a three-year-old, and both times he had been defeated. But now it was different. He knew his time had come. So he could not be quiet. On the fateful morning, he was thirty miles from the reservation, and with feet spread wide apart and antlers threatening, stood a proud figure in the centre of the road down which Tom Shook desired to drive with a load of milk, and refused to budge. As Tom's horse showed a strong inclination to upset the milk and go home, Tom decided the east road, which branched off half a mile back, was, after all, the better way to the village.

At noon Old Bill scared two children, fifteen

miles farther north, by trotting along the road behind them.

At six o'clock, while it was still daylight, he suddenly, and as unexpectedly as an earthquake or the offer of a cocktail from William Jennings Bryan, made his appearance on the streets of Lenox. Lenox is not unused to Rolls-Royce limousines on her elm-arched streets, nor has she quite forgotten the aspect of fine horses, stepping high with the flash of silver harness. But when a big bull moose suddenly emerged from the woods behind the French Renaissance "cottage" of one of her wealthiest residents, and proceeded up the macadam toward the post-office, Lenox had considerable of a start. The village wireless (an ancient and still unexplained mystery of the science of transmission) crackled, and by the time Bill reached the well-kept green in front of the Episcopal church, there was a crowd already assembled, most of them on the opposite side of the fences, however.

Bill trotted up on the green, raised his head, and surveyed the assemblage—which was growing momentarily—with some contempt, and just

a bit of alarm. It was a trifle thick, even for him. He tossed his antlers, and made a stamp or two on the precious turf. The sexton rushed into the church for the telephone,

Snyder was at his home, in the next town. The sexton got him, his voice trembling with excitement. The moose was rampaging. The children were in danger. Couldn't he, the sexton, shoot him? This was a bit too much, really—and pawing up his lawn, too. Besides, he might dash right into the crowd any minute and ——

" Look here," came the voice of Snyder, " you tell the crowd to go home, if they're afraid. If anything happens to that moose, I'll have you arrested. Go out and chuck a stone at him. Remember now—the fine's two hundred and fifty dollars! "

The sexton went back—as far as the church door. Finally he edged down on the drive, picked up a stone, and threw it.

" Go 'way," he said.

Old Bill made a break for the October Mountain road. He had a brief glimpse of several posteriors disappearing over fences on either side,

and a horse climbing a tree. Presently he passed a farmhouse on the road to the reservation. The farmer called Snyder on the telephone.

"There was a dog chasing him," he reported.

"Poor dog," said Snyder.

But Bill wasn't running from the dog. He was running in answer to a challenge in his blood, an instinct which told him that night he would hear the cow moose call. Leaving the road, he sprang up the wild, steep ravine of Roaring Brook, leaving the baffled dog far behind, and came crashing and swishing into the spruces and hemlocks of the reservation swamp.

It was twilight now, with the hint of a moon aglow in the east, and presently, from the other side of the shadowy water of the little, hidden pond, came the thrilling call of a cow. Old Bill coughed, loudly, like a challenge, his head up, his nostrils expanded. He heard an answer, off to the left, and swished his antlers under the low-hanging limbs as he made toward it.

The big old bull was standing in an open glade, awaiting him. There were no preliminaries—only a mutual charge, a crash of locking antlers,

the thud of hoofs, the strain of bone grating on bone, the hiss of breath through straining nostrils. Back and forth the battle went, even weight against even weight, neck strength and endurance counting. As long as the two pairs of antlers were locked, the great animals swayed and crashed against the bushes, the trees. Cedars six inches in diameter were snapped off. The turf was torn and churned into mire. Then the old bull wrenched his horns free, drew back, and charged once more. Bill was cleverer than of old. He side stepped, like an agile boxer, and reared on his hind legs. As the lowered head of his opponent went past, down came his forefeet like a pointed sledge-hammer on the other's neck. Blood spurted. The old moose wheeled with a roar of rage and pain, and again Bill side stepped, and this time gouged his side. Then, once more, the great antlers locked, the two bodies, more than a ton of bone and muscle, crashed against the trees, the panting breath, the smothered roars, resounded through the still forest.

At last the older neck gave way, the head went

sideways, then down, the great body, pried from its balanced purchase in the miry loam, slipped, toppled, and the vanquished leader of the herd went down on his knees, with a bleeding head, with a red wound slit across the neck, with a gouged flank, beaten at last, uncrowned, laid low.

Bill wrenched his locked antlers free, butted his opponent once more for full measure, stood up and proclaimed his triumph, and then went through the gathering night toward the call of the cow.

But, as has been known to be the case with humans, victory did not bring content to Old Bill. Just at first it did, perhaps, as he piloted the herd, young bulls and all, around the winter feeding with a new sense of dignity and importance. But it wasn't long before restlessness came upon him, a strange restlessness that seemed to come from some whisper of the north wind. The north! What was to the north, anyway? Bill, since that first escape from the reservation and the terror of the smoking monster on the iron road, had never crossed the tracks in all his wanderings. He had been south to Connecticut,

west to New York, east till he glimpsed the Connecticut River plains, but never north across those shining rails where the monster thundered. But now, with two cows and a calf, he wandered down the rocky slope to a wild ravine where it was only a jump across the tracks to a rocky slope on the other side, drove his charges, reluctant, across, and browsed north into a new country. They pushed on, with good cover and plentiful feeding for a day and a night, until, at dawn, with the rising sun just flushing the snowy summits and night still lying like pools of darkness in the deep ravines, Old Bill stood upon a bare, rocky, mountain shoulder and looked into Vermont.

He saw a tumbled world of mountains, higher than those behind him, forest clothed, and stretching, ever taller, into the far distance, blushed pink at first by the rising sun, then misty blue and beckoning. Were there other and bigger bulls there to challenge? Was it the spell of the north that was laid upon him, the colder north which is the natural home of the moose, all the way to the Arctic Circle? Was it instinct that made him

sniff the frozen wind, blowing down from those far summits, or dreams that filled his dark, unblinking eyes? At any rate, he plunged down the mountainside, nipping a few twigs of striped maple for breakfast as he went, and followed the banks of a brawling little river that was foaming southward—up-stream.

That next summer, from a camp in the wilderness of the lower Green Mountains, moose were reported, the first reported in the State for many years. There were scoffers who said it couldn't be so. But these moose were shy. Nobody was chased up a tree, nobody was challenged on any of the few rough roads which cross the range. It was evident that Old Bill, penetrating deeper into a wilderness where men were fewer, was himself lapsing into a condition of greater wildness. That next autumn deer hunters up in the big range to the east of Manchester, Vermont, the beautiful valley village where the golfers revel, reported " a huge black deer, bigger than a cow." They fired at this strange " deer," but they didn't hit it. That cow moose escaped, to call across the brown mirror of some mountain tarn, pungent

with the odor of autumn leaves in the water, to call for the chief of the herd, and to hear from the opposite shore, or the rocky forest above her, the answering coughs of Old Bill, and presently the swish in the low-hanging branches of his great pronged antlers as he came to his mate. Somewhere in those high, wild mountains, three thousand, four thousand feet above the sea, Old Bill goes browsing, up hill and down, thirty miles, forty miles, on his long, powerful legs, between sleep and sleep, no longer meeting men on his journeys, nor wanting to, but avoiding them now, the shyness, the alertness of the wilderness sinking deeper and deeper into his consciousness, the northward urge toward yet deeper forests, yet wilder country, coming to him when the winds are up and tearing southward with a race of cloud and sting of sleet over the summit ledges. Will it be the antlers of some rising young champion in his own herd, or the broader horns of some wilderness-bred bull of the great north ranges that finally teaches him when his time of old age is come? The way is long, the dangers many, to those free ranging herds above the St. Lawrence. Old Bill may never get there. All one can say is that his nostrils quiver to the keen north wind.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF LUCY

LUCY was born with a price on her head. Lucy doesn't sound much like the name of a fugitive from justice, of a vicious character hunted for the legal reward. Nevertheless, Lucy is what she came to be called by all the countryside, no doubt just because Lucy is such a foolish name for a wildcat. Lucy is a nice name for the heroine of a poem by William Wordsworth, but as the Christian appellation for twenty-five pounds of gray-black and dirty white fur and muscle and claws roaming the rocky, precipitous slopes of one of the highest of the Berkshire Hills, seeking what it may devour, the name has sufficient incongruity to please the Yankee taste.

I hesitate a little to tell the entire story of Lucy's career, lest I be called a " nature fakir." It is all true, but those who raise the cry of nature

faking will never believe anything true about animals which goes contrary to what they themselves have seen, or the way in which the average run of animals behave. Nevertheless, you cannot always predict animal conduct from the average run, any more than you can predict human conduct. There is more of the animal in humans than we used to suppose (before 1914, for instance), and there is more of the human in animals. Anyhow, I'll take a chance, and tell Lucy's story in defiance of the scoffers.

But first I wish I could take you into the country where Lucy was born and brought up. I could, very easily, if you were here, and your wind was good, for it isn't more than a mile behind my house—or, rather, above my house. You may have been past the spot, indeed, purring along in your motor, on your way to Stockbridge and Lenox. But going past it and going to it are quite different things. Leaping directly up from the State highway is the steep wall of the mountain, a long wall, or, rather, series of jutting shoulders, stretching north and south for ten miles or more, with the summit a mile behind

them, and beyond that more forests and scrub land, and then a precipitous, wild drop into New York State. This wall runs up for some distance timbered heavily with birches and chestnuts and other hard woods, and then enters a belt of fallen, fern-covered boulders, with hemlocks wedged between, and, finally, the almost sheer precipices which lead, in a series of steps, to the top of the shoulder, where there is a forest of storm-dwarfed pitch pines. In this forest herds of deer winter, going up and down the mountain for water at the springs below, and for feed when the snow is lighter. On top of the ridge the snow is always blown thin, and some food is available there in the worst weather. Just under this ridge, at the base of the precipices and among the fallen boulders below them, are numerous little caves or dens. Into these dens the fallen leaves drift. They are more or less protected in winter, and cool in summer. You might suppose it would be a likely spot for wildcats.

It is.

For one thing, almost no people ever get there. There is no trail except the dim paths used by

the deer, which are known only to a few hunters and trappers. The undergrowth is a dense mass of laurel, through which progress is difficult and even painful. Going my best, it takes me one and a half hours to make the fifteen hundred foot ascent to the top of the ridge. Now, the wildcat is, after all, a cat, and you know that the most domestic of pussies seldom cares for human society as such. It hangs around you because you feed it. (Of course, if you have a cat, you won't admit this—*your* cat is an exception!) It prefers to mind its own business, and often resents interference. The wildcat has these traits raised to the *nth* power. Furtive, sly, aloof, it wants to be let alone, to avoid contact with men, to go its own way. Though often heard yowling in the woods at night—it has a blood-curdling yell, a sort of *meow—yang-yang-yang*—it is seldom seen, and when it is seen, it is generally alone, sneaking along by itself, the very epitome of wild self-sufficiency. Hence, if a mother cat wished to retire from all danger of contact with man and other disturbing things, she could, in our country, hardly pick a better place

than the dens amid the boulders far up on the steep mountain shoulder, with a half mile of trackless laurel and dense forest below, and two hundred feet of precipice above, and all around, for concealment, the dense hemlocks, the ferns which drape the rocks, the dead, fallen tree trunks, the caked masses of last year's leaves still upheld on the fallen limbs which always litter a virgin wood, making little thatched roofs under which to creep.

This is the spot that Lucy's mother chose late one winter for her home, running far from the male cat who was Lucy's father, because the male wildcat is anything but a gentleman and has a fondness for killing his offspring after they are born, if he can find them when their mother is out foraging. If the mother is at home, he is wise enough to leave them alone! Lucy's mother, however, had no intention of bringing her family into the world where father would be likely to find them. She ran away from him ten miles, crossed a river on the ice, a swamp on the hassocks, and went up the mountain till she came to the fallen boulders. There, in a nice warm den,

lined with dead leaves, under an overhanging rock and facing to the southward, she decided to establish her home, and there Lucy and three brothers and sisters were ultimately born.

There was no great family resemblance between them. Lucy was a decided brunette, very dark, which is the accepted type of beauty among wildcats, while her two sisters were gray and dirty brown, and her brother was more or less mottled, half-way between. Had you come upon them playing in front of their " door," however, on a warm spring day, while mother lay on her side, paws lazily outstretched, purring contentedly (but with one ear up and both eyes watchful), you would have said it was a pretty picture they made, and you might have called, " Come, kitty, kitty "—and then beat it, as mother coiled with a spitting snarl, and leaped off the rock!

But, like Wordsworth's Lucy, few knew, and few could know, how this Lucy grew, beside ways even less trodden than those " beside the springs of Dove." In fact, none knew. Only twice that summer did any human being come up past the den, and on both occasions Lucy's mother heard

them coming, and had the kittens far out of sight. A stray dog or two, to be sure, trailed her up the mountain after she had been down the slope and across the road into the swamp stalking pheasants. But a lone dog, without a hunter behind him, had no terrors for her. She did not court trouble, to be sure, relying on speed to escape it. But if she was forced to fight, she knew how, and if the dog got away, he was a sadder and a wiser pup. So Lucy grew, unmolested, with her brother and sisters, and learned the needed lessons of life in the vocational school at first conducted by her mother, and later by that still more ancient schoolmistress, Dame Nature.

The children were brought up, in fact, much like domestic kittens, except they were taught to avoid human beings, to keep out of sight of all strange things, to hide from strange noises. But even domestic kittens are thus brought up if their mother has gone wild. They were taught to fight in play, amid the dead leaves in front of the den, and to bare their claws and strike quick and hard when the mother cat pretended to resent their attempts to play with her, and made lightning

dabs at them with her powerful paw. They were taught to climb a tree, and to conceal themselves amid the branches. They were taught, by watching their mother, how to lie out on a fallen log across the deep brown pool in the brook at the foot of the slope, motionless as a statue, and make a sudden plunge with one paw, claws out and curled upward, as a trout came past, catching it under the belly and tossing it to the bank. They learned, too, how to creep up on partridges sitting on their nests, or sleeping; how to crouch behind a bush along the rabbit paths and wait patiently till a cottontail came by, or even, in favorable spots, how to lie out along a limb over the path and drop on the rabbit from above. They learned how to run through the forest, too, as well as how to wait, always zigzagging, nose near the ground, ready to pounce on any deer-mouse that might be there. At night, as their mother went hunting through the woods, she would every now and then raise her head and emit the startling, raspy, snarling yell—*meow*—*yang-yang-yang*—which often caused some sleepy animal or bird to start in fright and betray its hiding place. Lucy

and her brother and sisters practiced this yell, rather feebly at first, but with growing confidence and volume. All these things they learned first from watching their mother, and then from practice, after their mother drove them with cuffs from the maternal food supply and made them hunt for themselves.

It was considerably after the self-sustaining point had been reached that they saw their mother do a strange thing. It was early morning, not yet sun-up, and in the half light you couldn't see far through the night mists which still enveloped the mountain at the altitude of the den. The kittens were all asleep, and so was the mother cat, having just come in weary and also hungry, after a long trip to the plain for food, a trip which was unrewarded by anything satisfying to a healthy appetite. The previous winter had been a hard one, with deep snow and extreme cold. As a result, the partridges and pheasants were few, the rabbits had been largely killed off by great horned owls and goshawks which descended from the north, and now the picking for wildcat was pretty poor. Indeed, the mother cat that night had

been so hungry that twice she had attempted to raid a hen yard, being driven off by dogs both times. Now she suddenly started up from her first sleep, ears pricked up, white teeth just showing, yellow-green eyes intense. Her action roused the kittens, who also started up. On soft feet the mother cat went to the entrance of the den, the kittens following.

Something was coming down the precipice above. It swished through the bushes like a deer, and a second later they all caught the deer smell, though, of course, by comparison with a dog or fox, their powers of smell were slight. But it was evidently a small deer, from the sound it made. Even at that, the kittens were surprised to see their mother sneak one paw out, then another paw out, till she glided almost like a snake up over the top of the boulder above the den, and from that to another, and so to another, till she was crouched directly over the deer trail down the mountain. She had never hunted a deer before, and the kittens knew it was because she dreaded those terribly sharp hoofs, and the sharper horns of the buck.

Scarcely had she reached her post over the trail than a fawn appeared, a bit more than half grown, trotting and leaping down the dim game trail, evidently seeking his mother. As he drew near the old cat, his nose told him there was danger, and he suddenly reared, and then swerved toward the thicker bushes. But with a yowl the cat sprang far out from the rock, and landed squarely on his shoulder. The deer gave a frightened bellow and began to rear and plunge as he ran, endeavoring to batter the cat off his neck by diving sideways against trees. The cat, however, with incredible speed and agility, shifted from one side of his back to the other, keeping her forepaws around his neck, claws sunk in deep, and tearing with her powerful, razor-like teeth. The kittens saw her disappear down the mountain on her wild ride, and as fast as they could, they scampered after.

It was down in the chestnuts that they found her. The fawn had tripped and fallen, and that gave her the chance to get in a death grab at a vital artery. The little deer was breathing its last. The mother cat snarled and cuffed her

hungry kittens away as they came eagerly up to the meat, but presently she let them feed, too, and all that day, their little stuffed bellies as round as balloons, they slept in the sun at the mouth of their den, their mother sleeping beside them. Once or twice they woke up and purred. Life is certainly worth while when you are filled up on young, tender venison!

The kittens all grew rapidly, but Lucy fastest of all. She was destined to be a big cat, with dark fur, almost black, which thickened up as the frosty autumn nights came on, till she was worth to the hunter not only five dollars for the bounty, but another ten for her skin. Having no means of knowing this, however, Lucy was not vain. But she shared with her brother and sisters a memory of venison that made her, and them, rash with the rashness of youth. Their mother had departed now, they did not know where. They had attempted to follow, but she had turned, with a spit and a bristle of fur, and driven them back. The truth is, probably, she was weary of maternal cares for a time, and wanted to be rid of them, now they were large enough to shift for them-

selves. But they stayed on together in the old den, knowing no other home, and hunted the mountain, sometimes scattered, sometimes in a pack, and often going hungry for all their efforts. Hence it was that Lucy and her brother, coming upon a fawn one day apart from its mother, sprang at it without hesitating. The brother missed it, but Lucy succeeded in landing on its back. It dove madly into the scrub, with the other cat at its heels, and almost before Lucy knew what was happening she was knocked from its shoulder by a terrific blow. Even as she landed, she saw her brother rise in the air and go spinning into the bushes as the mother doe caught him with her hind heels. Two sore and sick cats retired to the den and nursed their wounds for several days, before they were fit for hunting again. Experience is a hard teacher, but it had taught them not to tackle a small deer unless sure that it is quite alone.

It was in December, when all four of them were hunting together, that they did come upon a young doe, hardly more than a fawn, quite alone. It was amid the pitch pines on the top of

the ridge above the den. All that day the cats had heard distant gunshots, both from the swamps on the plain below, and even from the mountainside, and had noticed that the deer were breaking up the slope in unusual numbers. But they didn't know it was the opening day of the deer hunting season. They only knew the deer were up on the mountain in great numbers by mid afternoon. On discovering the little doe, they tried their best to stalk it close enough to make a sure spring, but the deer was too quick for them, and bolted, over the ledge. The four cats bounded in full pursuit.

Down went the deer, over the precipitous rocks, twenty feet at a jump, the cats, with Lucy in the lead, only a jump or two behind. Below the ledges came the belt of tumbled, fallen boulders and rock fragments, and here the doe had a harder time, as she had to work between the rocks, while the cats could leap from top to top. Lucy almost had her once. In fact, her claws did draw blood from the deer's hind quarters as she sprang from behind. But the deer just got through, and broke into the dense laurel. Here

she could spring over, when the cats had to work under, and she increased her lead. Once below the laurel, into the more open woods, she rapidly left the four pursuers behind.

Lucy was the last to give up the chase, but finally she turned back, too, when the terrified deer broke out of the woods into an open field behind a house, and made her way back up the mountain, busily looking for mouse tracks in the light snow as she went. If one couldn't have a deer, a mouse would do! Lucy was nothing if not philosophical.

But, as it turned out, there was a greater tragedy lurking in this exploit than the mere loss of a venison supper. The craftiest hunter and trapper in all that section of the country had been hidden in a leaf blind beside a deer trail at the base of the upper ledges, thinking that the deer frightened by the hunters in the swamps below would be coming up this way. Two or three had passed him, but he was waiting for a fat buck, and didn't shoot. He had heard the racket, then the little doe came plunging over the ledges, and had seen her go by, just out of gunshot, with the four

cats in full pursuit. Then he had waited patiently, and he had seen the four cats come back, first one gray one, then a gray and a mottled one, then Lucy herself, so dark and fine furred that his finger itched on the trigger. None of them, however, got near enough for a shot. They were headed, of course, for their den, some distance off around a point. As sly as they, this hunter watched them disappear, nor did he attempt to follow. Instead, he went down the mountain as darkness gathered, and got down his rusty steel traps from their peg in the woodshed.

He didn't tell anybody what he had seen, for two reasons. The first reason was that he didn't want anybody else to get those cats; the second reason was that he felt sure nobody would believe him, it being an accepted fact that wildcats hunt alone, not in packs, and never chase deer, anyhow. But he had seen what he had seen, just the same.

He didn't set his traps at once. Instead, he waited till deer hunting week was over, and then he went fishing through the ice. When he had accumulated several pickerel, he journeyed up

the mountain with his traps, picked up the cat tracks in the snow, and close to their ranging trails he set his fish-baited steel jaws. Then he went down the mountain again, his pale blue eyes seeing far through the winter woods and taking in details that would quite escape your attention or mine, or reading records on the snow—the book he knew best.

Now, Lucy and her brother and sisters loved fish above all other food, just as a domestic cat does. Their noses might not be keen on a scent, as a dog's nose is, but they could certainly smell fish a long way off. Waking from her doze that afternoon, Lucy sniffed the frosty air and emitted a sharp, excited meow. The other three cats awoke, too, and they also sniffed and grew excited. Out of the den all four of them went, and headed straight for the odor. Of course, if it had been Big Reddy, the fox who lived down near the plains below, who had smelled some unexpected delicacy in the neighborhood, he wouldn't have made directly for it at all. He would have trotted in a big circle all around the smell, looking for the joker. He would have come, at some

point in the circle, upon the tracks of the man who took the bait in, and that would instantly have intensified his suspicion. He would probably have followed down these tracks, and at some bush or other the trapper's carelessness would have allowed the bait to touch a twig and the fox would have connected the bait smell with the man track. That would have made him even more suspicious, and if, ultimately, he found the bait at the end of the man track, no matter how hungry he might be, the chances are Big Reddy would turn away. Hence the adjective "foxy." But Lucy and her tribe had no such keenness of nose, nor keenness of reasoning powers. Fish meant food—that was the extent of their logic—which is all right so far as it goes. With a snarl and a cuff, Lucy drove away her brother and pounced at one fish. The other sisters each sprang for the fish they spotted.

An instant later there was a terrific yowling and screaming and thrashing of bodies.

Lucy, because of her incredible speed of action, had twitched up her paw as she felt it descend on something cold and metallic, and the jaws of the

trap had got her by one toe only. With a snarl and a lunge, she tore herself free, and diving into the thick bushes, snarling with pain and anger, began indignantly to lick the bleeding stub of her amputated toe and claw. The brother, cuffed away at first, now reaped the reward of meekness, and ate the fish in safety. But the other two cats, each caught fast in a trap, were howling and plunging, trying to wrench themselves free by main strength. The log drags, to which the traps were fastened, were pulled about, till they caught in the bushes and held fast. The snow was churned up. The lonely forest resounded to their cries. But all their efforts availed them nothing. Their heartless brother sneaked around and ate their fish, too.

The next morning Lucy, nursing her wounded paw in the den, heard two gunshots not far away, and pushed deeper into the shadows, snarling at her brother. There were no sounds from the trapped sisters after that. But presently there was the smell of fish again. The brother, remembering only his feast of yesterday, sallied forth. But Lucy was, like Peter's wife's mother,

sick of a fever, and lay still, licking her paw. Presently she heard her brother screaming, but still she did not budge. She slept fitfully that day, his cries now and again awaking her, and at nightfall felt a little better, and very hungry, for it had been two days now since she had tasted food. The fish smell was still in the air. She went forth, her foot bleeding again as the crusty snow cut it, and ate first the fish at her brother's trap. Then she sniffed. There was more somewhere about. But Lucy was capable of learning by experience. She approached it warily. The thing which had hurt her before had been on the ground almost under the fish. The fish was placed at the base of a rock. Lucy climbed up on the rock, lay flat on her belly, and cautiously lowered her well paw down, down, till one claw caught in the fish, and she could hook it up. Seizing it in her mouth, she went back to the den with it hastily, and ate it there at her leisure. Then she slept.

She was waked by a single shot, and of course became instantly alert. This time her senses told her, presently, that danger was approaching, and

gliding out of the den in the dim morning light, for the sun was not yet up, she sneaked like a ghost over the snow, and between the rocks, up the precipices above. After a time, crouched in a thicket on the topmost ledge, she peered back and saw one of the feared and hated race of men standing alert near the mouth of the den, and then coming on as if to follow up her trail. She turned once more and headed through the brush toward the summit of the mountain. She found a warm spot on the south side of a rock, and slept all day in the sun, letting her paw heal, and when night came she hunted, but in vain. The next day instinct led her back to the old den.

As she came once more to the top of the ridge, the fish smell greeted her. This time the fish was close to the den, and at the base of a straight faced rock too high to reach down from above to the fish. But Lucy had other resources. She climbed a smallish hemlock, crept cautiously out on a lower branch till it sagged far down with her weight, and again sneaked up the fish on her claw. She nearly fell into the trap, to be sure, but managed to land on her feet at a safe dis-

tance. Then she took her meal back up the ledge, having no desire to be wakened by a gun barrel poked into the den.

Now, our trapper friend, having already three cats to show by way of proof, had told his story at last (and collected his bounty), and he didn't hesitate to add as new embellishment the tale of the fourth cat, Lucy, who could steal bait out of a trap, and was minus a toe on her off front paw, thanks to her first lesson. Naturally, since traps seemed of no avail, somebody suggested a hunt. That was how it happened that as Lucy was returning one morning from pheasant hunting down in the young pine thickets at the base of the mountain, taking the stone wall for a path, as it was easier going, she heard suddenly the deep, purposeful baying of two hounds on her trail.

Well, if the dogs were after her, they would have considerable of a jaunt! Lucy's idea of getting away from a dog was simply to run and run till she had gone so far the dog gave up in despair. So now she headed straight up the mountain, on over the ledges, through the scrub above, over the bare, wind-swept summit cone,

down the other side, across the sunny fields of the table-land hamlet which lies up there behind the dome of the big mountain, and, avoiding the few scattered farms, into the dense woods on the farther side. These, however, were no ordinary dogs, she began to realize. They weren't mere stray hunters; they were trained, hard-working hounds. Ever they came baying steadily on her trail, not getting dangerously close yet, but certainly not dropping behind. Lucy rested. She was weary, and her paw hurt her, for it wasn't yet completely healed, nor the sickness all gone from her. Her rest let the dogs up too close for comfort. She plunged quickly down the cliffs ahead of her, where they drop into New York State, the dogs now in full cry behind, for one of them had caught sight of her.

Lucy was going it blind now—she was in a spot where she had never been before. Leaping along in a deep gorge beside a brook, the dogs almost at her heels, she suddenly found herself at the jumping-off place. The brook simply slid over a lip of rock and plunged straight down sixty feet! There was no turning back, for the

only way back was up the gorge. Lucy didn't want to fight two dogs. She saw a tree, one of three or four pine trees down here beside the brook, growing close to the face of the cliff above her, and rising fifty feet without a limb. Just as the first dog was almost on her, she sprang for this tree, and went up the trunk just as you've seen your cat go up a tree when the neighbor's dog came into the yard.

This was exactly what the hounds expected. Having treed their quarry, they began to bark excited signals to the hunters who were coming on behind (a long way behind, by now), and to jump around the base of the trunk.

But Lucy kept on up into the branches. Once in their protection, she looked about her. Higher up a branch leaned out and almost touched the cliff face. Lucy went up to it, out along it, and measured the distance to the little ledge she saw on the cliff face. Then she sprang. The dogs, seventy-five feet below, didn't see her spring, nor hear her soft, padded paws land on the ledge. From this ledge a slanting crevice of the rock, or small chimney as a mountaineer would call it,

led up another thirty feet to the top of the precipice. Lucy got into this crevice, and with the help of the frozen moss and mould lodged in it, worked her way to the top. There she crouched a moment, looking over the rim with her yellow-green eyes at the dogs below, and then slipped quietly and easily into the forest.

When the hunters came, they found the dogs still baying the tree. But there was no wildcat in the branches. After a while, they worked around to the top of the cliff, and found out how she escaped. But it was too late to put the dogs on the trail again. They were a dozen miles from home, with a mountain between.

After that, Lucy was a famous character.

Being a famous character has its penalties, especially when you've one toe missing and nobody can mistake your tracks. It was that missing toe which betrayed to Solon Littleton the fact that it was Lucy who came into his chicken yard and killed two of his pet Rhode Island Reds. That was in February, after two weeks of tremendous cold and heavy snow. Lucy was desperately hungry. Solon had a dog, too, but the dog

was sleeping inside. As soon in the morning as the theft was discovered, however, Solon put the dog on the tracks, and told him to go to it. Teddy was a big hound dog, that had probably started out in life to be a fox hound, but had changed its mind too late for a really successful outcome, and tried to be a pointer—or a bulldog (the matter was always in dispute between Solon and his neighbors). The hound started off on the tracks, but Solon delayed following till his wife had given him his coffee and doughnuts (the latter broken by Solon meditatively, and the pieces dipped into the former, before eating).

Meanwhile Lucy was not a great way off—perhaps half a mile down in the swamp pines, finishing up her own breakfast and raising a mighty purr of thanksgiving therefor. The baying of one hound didn't greatly disturb her, and she let him get rather near before she started up. But she had reckoned without due consideration of the depth of the snow and the superior length of this dog's legs. She got across the road all right, on her way to the mountain cliffs (her instinctive refuge), but before she could make the

woods above the high pasture she realized that the dog would be up to her. There was no available tree—only a big, cleft boulder, overhung with a wild grape-vine. It was a case of having to fight, and she dove under the grape-vine, into the cleft of the rock, where she turned at bay and waited her pursuer.

The dog came crashing and baying in under the vine, and instantly Lucy was on his back. There was hardly room in that restricted cleft for him to turn around, though Lucy could double herself in it without trouble. She had him at this initial disadvantage, and she had, beside, the great advantage of her own superior speed of attack in combat. Her game was to keep on top of him, clawing at his eyes and throat, and biting at his head, while he tried frantically to get her down, to throw her for a bite at her throat. He couldn't do it, and it was already a badly used up dog that was fighting for his life now in behind the grape-vine when Solon, guided by the yowls and spits and bays of the combat, came plunging up the pasture through the snow, calling frantically to the dog to come out.

When he drew near, Solon hesitated about drawing nearer. The sounds issuing from the cleft were not reassuring, even to a man with a gun, and Solon was not a hunter, anyhow. But he did love his Rhode Island Reds, and he did rather care for his dog, and he did relish five dollars, which was the bounty on cats. So finally he approached close to the opening, and peered in, gun thrust forward, cocked. But he couldn't tell which was dog and which was wildcat—or not for long enough to fire. Again he yelled at his dog. The dog tried to back out, but the grapevine caught him. The cat was following him up, striking at his face, but protected from the gun by his body. It was only at that instant that Lucy really became aware of Solon, and suddenly she seemed to rise right through the grapevine, coming straight at Solon's head. He emitted a yell that would have done credit to Lucy herself, and jumped to one side. At the same instant the gun went off. The flame singed Lucy's coat, but did her no other harm. She missed Solon by about the same margin as he missed her, landed on the snow, whirled like a

flash of light, and was off up the hill. The poor dog tried to follow—he was game, whatever his breed—but it wasn't in him any more. Presently he rejoined his master at the bottom of the pasture, and the two of them went limply home.

Solon, naturally, never told a soul but his wife about this incident. Yet, as such things happen, it mysteriously became known. Lucy's fame rose another notch—and Solon set up the hard cider.

About that time Lucy moved. She wished to bring up her kittens in a less dangerous spot, where the sins of the parent wouldn't be visited upon them, and where, also, their father wouldn't be fussing around. So she trotted in the night far across the river into the hills to the east, where there was no big mountain such as she had left, but miles of scrubby woods and rocks and small cliffs full of dens, and only a few scattered farms and small, upland hamlets, ruins of what a hundred years ago had been prosperous villages.

Here Lucy spent a happy and contented sum-

LUCY CUFFED THE KITTENS BACK OUT OF SIGHT AND SNEAKED OUT OF THE DEN

mer, and reared a fine family. Only once was she disturbed. That was when Bill Snyder, the game warden, and his wife came up to camp on Loon Pond, not far from her den. The game warden was rather given to snooping around, and one evening he and Mrs. Snyder walked up an old logging road which led perilously close to Lucy's abode. Lucy cuffed the kittens back out of sight, and sneaked out of the den. Whoever, whatever, it was passing, she proposed to be ready for it. Seeing Bill and Mrs. Snyder on the old road, she crept softly along in the bushes just behind them, making no sound, alert, watchful. Once they paused, spoke, and Bill turned as if to come toward her. At that she snarled, and Mrs. Snyder, in the dusking woods, caught the twin gleams of her yellow-green eyes.

Then Mrs. Snyder screamed. Both humans began to walk toward the open, at a considerably accelerated pace. Lucy sneaked along, just behind, and in the bushes. Again, looking over her shoulder, Mrs. Snyder caught the glint of Lucy's eyes. Lucy had to trot after that.

At the edge of the field she stopped and

watched to make sure that the humans were really going away. Then she returned to her kittens.

(Bill told somebody later that he wanted to investigate, but his wife was afraid.)

The hunting was so good that summer that Lucy had no occasion to risk a chicken raid, or to try again the dubious experiment of tackling a fawn. There were plenty of rabbits, grouse, mice, and other small things, and after she left her kittens and the winter colds came on, Lucy was stout and sleek, with a fine, thick coat. But with the accumulation of the snow, the burrowing in of the woodchucks, and, more or less, of the mice, the departure of many of the birds, and the keen competition with the craftier foxes for the game that remained, Lucy found the pickings scanty again, and began to move about. She grew bold once more, and twice raided chicken yards, leaving her telltale track in the snow. Traps began to be set for her once again, and hunts were organized; but she managed to escape the traps, and she outran the dogs, and the end of the winter found her ready to rear a second

family in a big, hollow fallen hemlock up a steep ravine in the back hill country, not far from a tumbledown farm or two.

No one suspected Lucy's presence there, least of all old man Parmalee, who left most of the farming to his son, but still went out for the cows every night, to the pasture which led up the slope and met the ravine woods where Lucy had placed her den. It was a chilly May evening, later than his usual time, when old man Parmalee, waking from a doze, realized that he hadn't been for the cows, doubtless because his son and daughter-in-law hadn't got back from the village to remind him of his duties. He got up hastily, looked for a raincoat, couldn't find one, and seized a rag rug from the floor, wrapping it around his aged shoulders and hurrying forth.

To his surprise, the cows were not at the bars. No telling what that old Jersey will do, he thought, when you wait too long—probably led the rest up the hill. Well, he'd get a scolding sure if he didn't go fetch 'em down. So he plodded up the slope, the rain dripping from the rug on his shoulders; and, finding hoof prints by

the ravine, into which the water had not yet settled, knew the cows had just gone up there. He trudged on, into the dimness of the wet woods, calling, " Coo-boss, coo-boss," over and over.

He had gone, it seemed to him, a long way, and was nearing the old fallen hemlock which he remembered from other years, when he heard a sudden snarl which froze his blood,—then he saw the green flash of two eyes, and made out a dim form stalking toward him. Old man Parmalee's legs grew miraculously twenty years younger. He turned and fled, down the ravine, tripping on roots, catching at trees with his hands to steady himself, forgetting entirely his rug, which flew off behind, forgetting the cows, forgetting everything but home.

He panted down the pasture, not daring to look behind, and almost fell into the dooryard, where his son and daughter-in-law were just getting out of the buggy.

" What the ——"

" Father, what's the ——"

" Wildcat—chased me—up the ravine—came right at me ——" the old man panted.

His son roared with unseemly mirth, but the woman, with a look of alarm, felt of the old man's wet back, and led him into the house.

"You'll feel better soon," she said.

Then she glanced at the floor.

"Why, where's the red and blue rug?"

"Tarnation—I wore it—couldn't find my old coat—must 'a' dropped it when the cat chased me—Martha made that rug, too. Tarnation, my old army pants was the blue in it."

"Where's the cows?" said young Parmalee, brusquely.

The old man gestured feebly. His legs had grown old again now, and were trembling.

"Up the ravine," he said. "You'll hev to go get 'em. *I* won't. The cat's by that old fell-down hemlock. If you see my rug, bring it back."

"Hang your old rug," said his son, crossly, stamping out.

Fifteen minutes later he also returned, panting.

"Dj'er git my rug?" the old man asked. "Dj'er git all the cows—the old Jersey, too?"

Young Parmalee gasped for breath. "I never see such a big cat!" he finally exclaimed.

"Believe me now, do yer?" the old man cackled. "But why didn't yer pick up my rug?" He spoke plaintively, but there was the hint of a twinkle in his watery blue eyes.

At ten o'clock the cows came back to the bars and woke the family up. It was after eleven before they were milked, and young Parmalee back in bed again. He retired with anything but kindly feelings toward Lucy.

The cows were not turned out the next morning, but early the second morning Lucy, returning to the den, heard suspicious sounds in the pasture, drawing nearer. She roused the kittens, drove them out of their warm, dead-leaf and wood-mould bed in the log, and began leading them rapidly up the rocks. But the dogs behind moved more rapidly. They picked up the fresh scent at the den, and suddenly their deep, rather mournful, slow baying (not the quick, excited baying they use on a fox track) told her they were on her heels. At the top of the hill

they were almost on her. She cuffed the three kittens under a rock, and turned to fight. Alone, she could have escaped, no doubt. At any rate, she had more than once in the past. But now she had her kittens to defend. There were two dogs, one a bit ahead of the other. As he drew near, she sprang, landing on his back, and had gouged his eye and torn both ears before the other hound closed in. Even the two of them, however, had all they could manage, and a bit more. Lucy was alive at both ends, and contrived to fight with her powerful hind legs into the face of one dog, while she rode the other. Clutch after frantic clutch by the hounds were rewarded only with mouthfuls of fur, and a tearing scratch in the face. The three of them rolled and fought and barked and screamed and snarled and spit down the rocks, till the heads and shoulders of two men appeared, coming from below, and a sudden shot rang out, and Lucy rose convulsively and fell limp between the dogs, which the men grabbed by the collars and pulled away.

The owner of the dogs examined her, rolling her over with his foot.

" By gum, it's Lucy!" he exclaimed. " Well, she lived up to her reputation to the end."

The battered dogs were sniffing up the trail again now, and barking at the crevice where the kittens had crept in. The men pulled them off, some way to one side, and waited. Presently the kittens came creeping out. They were pretty little things, and meowed plaintively for their mother.

" There's fifteen dollars more," said the hunter to young Parmalee. " You take the light one, I'll take the dark. We'll let the dogs run the third."

They fired, and two kittens fell. The third, with a frightened meow, scampered up the rocks and made for a tree.

" Go to it," said the hunter to his dogs.

" Hold on!" exclaimed Parmalee. " Call 'em back."

The man called, getting them to return with difficulty. "What's the big idea?" he demanded. " Five bucks is five bucks, ain't it?"

" I'm satisfied, that's all," Parmalee retorted. " The old cat chased father and me the other

night, and fought two dogs this morning, all for those kittens. Let one of 'em live, I say."

The other man shrugged his shoulders. "It's your land," he said. "But they're bad animals, and five dollars is ——"

"The skin'll be worth more next winter, when the cat's growed," Parmalee soothed him. "Better take your pups home now and patch 'em up."

Parmalee picked up the two dead kittens, stroking their warm fur with his hand. The hunter slung Lucy over his shoulder.

"Twenty-eight pounds, if she's an ounce," he said.

The dogs, with their bleeding muzzles, sniffed at her limply dangling tail as they all descended the pasture.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL JIM

JIM cracked his shell in a nest up in the tip of an old pine tree in the big swamp, and his first glimpse of the world was a vision of tree tops and blue sky. A baby bird, when you come to think of it, has considerable the better of a woodchuck, let us say, in the matter of environmental influences. That may be why birds are more attractive. But Jim, and his brother Jim and his sister Jim (why are crows always named Jim?) did not enjoy their Peter Pan-nish abode very long. The reason was that young Tom Harris knew a man who said he'd like a pet crow, and Tom assumed that, of course, he'd like three pet crows three times as much, so when Tom saw the nest in the swamp and heard the three babies crying up aloft for their dinner, as only baby crows can cry, he scurried home for a bag and a long string, returned clad in overalls (Tom was

mindful of an unreasonable maternal objection to pitch on the pants), and climbed the tree. This was a matter of no small labor, and after he had secured the three baby birds it was no less a job to lower the bag without injury, through the branches to the ground. He got them safely down, however, and carried them in triumph to the man who, in a careless moment, had expressed a desire for a pet crow.

He was a big man, with a big laugh, a big garden, a big dog, a big small son, and a big heart. The only thing little about him was his house, and that was a delightful old farmhouse between country road and garden, with the woods beyond. He had quite forgotten that he wanted a crow, but when he saw the contents of Tom's bag, he remembered that he wanted three. So that was how Jim and Jim and Jim found themselves, after their distressing adventure, in a new home at the bottom of a barrel, with a netting over the top, so neither cat nor dog could molest them. Tom and the big man's big small son were out in the garden digging up worms and grubs to stop their clamor.

Nothing, however, can stop the clamor of a hungry little crow. You dangle a nice fat grub in front of him, and he opens a yawning cavity of mouth and says, in a raucous, strident, impatient tone, "Caw!" Then you drop the grub in his mouth, and he keeps right on cawing, but swallowing at the same time, so that it sounds something like this—"Caw-w-obble, obble, obble." As soon as the grub is down, his mouth opens again and he crossly insists on more.

But the big man was wise. He knew that if you give a baby crow all it wants to eat, it will gorge itself into an untimely grave. So Jim and Jim and Jim were taught to leave the table hungry, as it were, and they throve on this involuntary self-denial. Soon a perch had to be put in half-way up the barrel, and before very long they were all three up on the rim, and then down on the ground, and the big man's son expected to see them fly away.

But they didn't fly away, not even after they had taught themselves to take the air. The big man's wife sometimes wished, perhaps, that they would, but they didn't. Sometimes they sailed

out over the fields and woods, but they always came back, especially when wild crows drew near them. Instead of going to their kind, they seemed to be in fear of them. But on the place they were in no fear of anything, least of all of Don, the big collie dog. Jim, our hero, was Don's chief tormentor. His favorite sport was to wait until Don was fast asleep, and then he would pick up a shining, smooth pebble (it wasn't always smooth, either!) in his beak, walk carefully up to the dog's head, lift the flap of his ear, and drop the pebble inside. Don would at once wake up with an impatient grunt, shake the pebble out, and go lie down somewhere else. As soon as he was asleep again, Jim would repeat the operation, until finally the poor dog would be driven to take refuge in the house.

Jim had other forms of sport, however. He discovered, for instance, that by flying down suddenly, with loud caws, upon the back of one of the sheep in the pasture, and fixing his claws in the sheep's wool, he could send the startled animal cavorting over the landscape. In this way Jim enjoyed many a free ride, and appeared to take

much the same pleasure in it that a cowboy takes in riding a bucking broncho. Still another trick was to wake up the family at five A. M. This he did by flying to the big man's chamber window ledge (the window was always open) and cawing at the top of his lungs, till somebody tossed him out a scrap of food. It wasn't exactly a pleasant trick, and Jim never knew how close he came sometimes to having his neck wrung!

In the matter of food, he and his brother and sister were peculiarly fortunate. Not only did they get table scraps, bits of meat (which they dearly loved), and all the crumbs from Don's dish, but the big man had a garden in which he hoed, and when they saw him enter this garden they flew with joyful noise, if not with song, after him, and followed his hoe or cultivator up the rows, pouncing greedily on every white grub his implement turned up. He used to call them his best helpers at such times, as indeed they were. They certainly ought to have become fat and healthy crows. Nevertheless, it is to be feared that they were somewhat afflicted with what the soldiers so euphoniously call cooties. One day

the big man saw Jim, and later Jim and Jim also, squatting contentedly down in a big ant hill, not taking a dust bath, like a hen, but just squatting. He couldn't conceive why they should choose such a place to squat in, until he chanced to read that the poilus in France spread their shirts on ant hills when no decootieizing machine was handy. That raised his already high estimate of Jim's intelligence.

But whether from parasites or some deeper cause, Jim's brother and sister never could seem to retain their flight feathers, and while they could skim about a few feet above the ground, only Jim became and remained a full fledged aeronaut. But it did not appear greatly to interfere with their happiness, and every night they hopped up the rungs of a ladder which ended under the overhang of the house eaves, and took their places to roost beside Jim, who flew there. This practice continued for some time. One day, however, as the two crippled birds were half hopping, half skimming, around the yard, Jim, from a tree near by, emitted a loud, startling caw. As if they understood him perfectly (as they

doubtlessly did), Jim and Jim scurried for cover under the grape-vines. At the same instant, out of the shadow of the woods swept a marsh hawk, hovered a second, and dove for the hurrying pair.

But he didn't get to them. Quick as he, Jim dove, too. He dove straight at the hawk, from above, and landed a vicious peck on his head. The hawk banked quickly, and swung around and up to meet his attacker, but Jim kept above him, and landed another jab. The hawk saw that his prey were under cover now, and lost. Pretending, with much dignity, to ignore Jim's existence, he flew rapidly away, the smaller bird, with loud caws, following him for three hundred yards or more. Then Jim resumed his vigil in the tree top. It was some hours later that he cawed again, and once more the shadow swooped, and once more Jim dove to the rescue.

That night, for the first time, Jim did not sleep on the top rung of the ladder, under the eaves, with his brother and sister. He perched on the ridgepole of the house, where he could command the whole horizon!

The big man pointed this out to his son.

"If every man," he said, "was as brave and watchful to defend his weaker brothers, this would be a better world."

"Jim's a good old Scout," said the big man's son.

Now you can call Jim's action instinct, or what you like. All I know is that Jim never roosted again on the ladder, but always on the ridgepole. It looks to me like a remarkably quick learning of a lesson, coupled with a natural disposition to protect his kind. I should say it showed Jim to be both intelligent and social.

When autumn came, and Jim was a fine, strong bird, with glossy black feathers that reflected the sun when he banked for a turn, the big man and his family decided to close the little farmhouse and go to the far-away city for the winter. They couldn't take Jim with them, nor his poor brother and sister, either.

"It will be all right to leave Jim," the big man said. "He can look after himself. But Jim and Jim can't. It would be cruel to abandon them."

So he caught the two crows with the imperfect

flight feathers, and Jim never saw them again. He flew around the garden cawing for them, but they did not appear. The next day, when he woke up and flew to the bedroom window, he found the window closed. He pecked at the glass, and made a loud noise, but nothing happened. Don was gone, too. No scraps were put out for him at breakfast time. Wondering and disconsolate, he flew around the deserted garden, and fed himself that day by watching the corn shocks standing in the field, and pouncing on the mice which ran in and out under them. That night he was bitterly cold upon the ridgepole, and without Jim and Jim to protect he saw no reason why he should remain on it. So he sought the ladder under the eaves—but that was gone! He flew over to a pine tree, and got in among the branches. There was no wind there, nor could any hawk see him from above while he slept. Toward morning he heard a noise overhead, a noise of many wings in steady beat, and now and then a caw. A great flock of crows were going south. Something stirred in him, some instinct to rise high into the air and join them. But he

did not go. This was home to him here, and, besides, he did not know what would happen to him among all those strangers. So he remained in his pine tree, while the flock streamed south.

Jim waited and waited about the deserted house, but still there was no scrap of breakfast by the door, no sign of the people and the dog he knew, no brother and sister for company. At last a snow came, and he was positively hungry. The mice burrowed under the snow, and it was hard to detect them. The stray kernels of corn around the fields and the barn were all covered. So were the oats. Jim made a higher flight than was his wont, and gazed over the surrounding country for signs of help. Far off, over a snowy meadow, he saw the black forms of three crows, and forgetting his fear in his hunger, he flew directly toward them.

They were circling and settling over the snowy fields when he drew near, and all three began to caw when they saw Jim coming. Their voices did not seem unfriendly. Jim recognized one of them as a crow which had lived that summer close to his yard. In fact, they seemed to be trying

to tell him of food in the field. He came closer, with increased confidence, till he could see that they were getting food from the black, exposed earth on the sides of a swift brook which cut through the grass, a dark, winding thread on the snow-white sheet of the meadow. Jim circled close now, three or four times, cawing a tentative answer to the greetings of the three strangers. Then he flew into a tree and watched the proceedings a few moments more, before actually venturing to join the tiny flock. At last he made up his mind, swung out on the air with a loud caw, and dropped to the side of the brook, extracting a mussel from the ooze, for that was what the others were doing.

After he had only partially satisfied his hunger, the other three crows flew away, flinging back a half invitation to join them as they went. Jim was tempted, but he couldn't quite make up his mind to go. Instead, he fished some more, and then he went back to his familiar pine tree for the night. For several days thereafter Jim joined these three crows every day, traveling with them about the country looking for food, and

learning from them many ways of getting it. They taught him, for instance, to fly low over a field where the snow was light, looking for signs of oat stalks, and when they were seen, to scratch close to them for dropped grain. They taught him the food value of many seeds, and how to peck around the cracks and bark scales of old trees (especially apple trees) and rotten stumps for grubs and larvæ. Jim, whose food had always come easy, was green at first, but he was a ready pupil, and could soon shift with the best, and seldom went hungry.

At last, however, there came a great storm, with a terrible wind and bitter cold. Poor Jim almost froze to death, huddled in the deepest, most protected part of his pine, because he could not venture out for food in such a blizzard, nor find any if he did venture out, and without a lot of food a bird, which is an intensely hot-blooded creature, soon perishes. His little engine has to be stoked regularly and energetically to keep up steam. It was not till late the following day that Jim could get out any distance in his search, and by then his vitality was so low that he could just

make headway against the wind. He rose high, and looked about, over a world in which half the landmarks were obliterated. Some way off, between the almost buried lines of stone walls which bounded the road, he saw a wood sled jogging along, falling into a walk now and then as the horses tugged it over a packed drift. On this sled were a man and several bags. Jim almost blew down toward it, like a bit of black paper on the gale, and his keen eyes now detected something dropping behind. Down lower he dropped, and with a caw of joy fell upon the grains of "mixed feed" which were oozing out from a bag on the back of the sledge, unknown to the driver. Every time the sledge had tipped backward as the horses pulled it up on to a packed drift, a little stream of cracked corn and other delicacies had poured out and still lay on the hard snow. Jim fell upon the first he spotted, and ate ravenously.

He began to warm up. His blood flowed again. His wings felt stronger. As soon as his hunger was satisfied, he rose into the air, and began to circle, cawing loudly against the chill, lemon-gold sunset. He was calling to his three

friends. He knew they must be hungry, too. Here was food enough for a hundred crows. He must find them, and let them know! At last he was rewarded by an answering caw, and one of the three appeared above the pines on the slope of the mountain. Jim swung rapidly toward him, down wind, and soon he was leading all three toward the precious trail of grain on the road. While the three ate, Jim, too, consumed a little more, walking back along the trail of feed, which evidently extended clear to the village.

But his work was not yet done. Flying to a roadside tree, the oldest crow peremptorily summoned the rest. This storm had created a dangerous crisis for all the crows who had elected to winter in those parts, instead of going south. Tribal safety demanded that as many as possible be notified of the salvation offered by the grain. Jim was to go north, he himself would go south, another east, another west. Each was to bring back all the crows he could muster as soon as it was daylight. So Jim's social consciousness was thus enlarged from the neighborhood to the tribe. No sleep in his warm tree for him that night!

He flew by the stars, over strange fields, cawing his tidings as he went, and making long détours to each side to cover all the area possible, and when the east reddened, he headed back, again swinging to left and right, cawing loudly, till he had gathered in more than a hundred and fifty crows behind him, coming by ones and twos and threes from many places. They reached the snowy road where the grain lay to find other crows there by the scores, then by the hundred, till the road for three miles, or all the way from the farmer's door back to the outskirts of the village, was a wide ribbon of white with a jet black band running down the centre, a band composed of famished and feeding crows. By ten o'clock there was no grain left. But by ten o'clock the sun was up, the storm wind had abated, the snow began to melt a bit on southward facing rocks, and the crows were saved.

After that, Jim did not go back to his pine to sleep alone. He was completely adopted into the band of three crows whose acquaintance he had first made, and became one of them. His period of loneliness was over.

The coming of his first spring was a great event in Jim's life. First of all, of course, it meant more food for less trouble. But it meant, too, the return of other birds—friendly crows, hostile hawks, and the hosts of song birds which were neither friend nor foe, but which would presently lay eggs and hatch broods that could be robbed for juicy meat. Night after night, from his roost in the tall pine up on the mountainside, Jim would wake and hear overhead the noises of northward moving birds—the honk of geese far aloft, the wing rustle, sometimes, of crows flying low, the division leaders cawing commands, the cheeps and twitters of the lesser folk of the air. Going across the meadows long before the leaves were out, he heard one morning the merry, sweet note of the redwings. Later he saw the bobolinks over the fields, and heard them gurgling their lovely song while on the wing. Farmers appeared with plows and from his aery pathways he could look all around and pick out the squares of brown loam, where the plow had been, each square a potential feeding ground, full of white grubs turned up by the plowshare.

The hawks came early. One morning in mid March Jim looked aloft, at a shrill cry which floated down, and saw sailing there on almost motionless wings a great red-tailed hawk. He didn't mind this fellow much, though, knowing it was unlikely to molest him. But the sharp shinned hawk which arrived that day and proceeded at once to course low over the mountain woods, swooping down to investigate the nest two of Jim's friends had used the season before, and which they intended rebuilding for the coming summer, was a different customer. The old crow cawed a summons, and the four of them went for this hawk on the rush. He didn't care to fight four of them, and they drove him away, chasing him for a full mile, while farmers in the fields looked up to see what the excitement was about.

But the most wonderful part of that first spring for Jim was the arrival in the neighborhood of several strange crows, one of them a female of his own age, in whom he took a sudden profound interest, and before whom he began to show off at every possible occasion. For her he preened his glossy feathers till they shone, he

did stunts in the air, he tried his best to sing (and perhaps she thought it was lovely, though nobody on the ground did!); he sat on a tree limb beside her, too, or as near as she would let him, and courted her ardently. Jim was in love! He was gloriously and persistently in love. And his persistence won. The object of his adoration at last consented to be his bride, and look over trees with him, with a view to building.

They chose a fork high up in a tall pine on the mountain, building the rough nest of sticks and leaves, and feeding at about that time on corn. Jim and his bride and Jim's three friends, and perhaps half a dozen other crows, all of whom were nesting that season up in the pines on the mountain, usually hunted corn together, in the early morning hours, when nobody but a farmer or a Broadway rounder who hasn't gone to bed, is up. The corn was best to eat, as well as easiest to find, just after it had sprouted. The tiny green shoots above the brown earth exactly located the grain, and made it easy to pull up without any digging. Then, too, the shoot having burst the shell, and the earth having softened it,

the whole grain was far tenderer and easier to eat. But one had to use care. In the first place, farmers didn't like to have their corn pulled up, and had an annoying trick of sneaking up with a gun and shooting you. In the second place, they had an almost equally annoying trick of covering the corn with a vile smelling and tasting black substance (called tar, or creosote), which quite spoiled the food, sometimes, in an entire field. One couldn't tell at all from the sprout whether the corn was tarred or not. One had to go to all the trouble of pulling it up first.

When Jim and his friends went corn hunting, and found a promising field, one of the number was always stationed in a tree where he could command a clear view of the approaches, to give warning of any danger. Then the others went to work, ready instantly to rise and fly away if the watcher uttered his warning caw. (If you listen to crows carefully enough, you yourself can learn their language sufficiently, at least, to differentiate between a caw of warning, say, a caw which means attack, and a playful caw. There are men who know many more crow words than

these few simple ones, and can even imitate some of them.) Jim himself was rather reckless at first, paying little attention to the bits of white cloth or shiny tin pans or stuffed dummies set up over cornfields. But one day what he thought was a dummy, it stood so still, opened fire on him with a gun, actually shooting off two of his tail feathers, and after that he grew as cautious as the wisest. But he never got over his temper when he pulled up tarred corn, and always, when that happened, he pulled up at least a dozen shoots more, just for spite. At least, that is what the farmers thought, though it may have been that he also had a hope he might finally get a kernel which wasn't tarred.

Mr. and Mrs. Jim were extremely proud of their family of four, when it finally appeared, though it wasn't much to look at (except to the eye of faith) for several days—merely yawning cavities of mouths opening into fuzzy, ugly, black bodies, without form and, if one could judge by their actions at the approach of food, most certainly void. It was a still prouder moment for Mr. and Mrs. Jim when they at last got the

babies, grown nearly to parental proportions, out of the nest, out of the pine tree, and down the slope into the open, where the entire family emerged one summer morning at five o'clock, the parents in the lead, the babies half walking, half flying on behind and making such a cawing and squawking as would have done credit to fifty impatient automobiles trying to toot a Georgia cracker out of the middle of the road. It was no small job to feed this growing family, and Jim and his wife had to start in early. At that, they had the better of the farmer in whose garden they sought for grubs, for he had to buy shoes for *his* children, and you know what that means these days!

The babies grew with extraordinary rapidity, however, and before long could forage for themselves. There were many other children in the colony up in the pines, and many were the early morning games of tag and prisoner's base the flock played in the pasture at the foot of the woods, the old folks joining in. At least, that is what they looked like, though the crows no doubt had other names for them. Games they

were, at any rate. Food was plentiful; now that the corn season was over nobody shot at them; and the whole flock throve and were happy.

But one night a great and terrible enemy came. He certainly had no business there on the Berkshire mountainside in summer, though in winter he was not uncommon. But in summer he should have been far to the north. Perhaps the hunting in the north had grown poor, and he had moved south early. At any rate, here he was—a great horned owl, more than two feet tall, with talons of terrible power and a carnivorous appetite that would not balk even at a skunk. Jim and the others in the flock were wakened toward morning by a loud cry for help cut off into silence in the middle, and then by the ominous flutter of great wings down in the trees. Jim himself fairly leaped up into the air, over the woods, and peered down into their shadowy depths, trying to make out the direction in which the marauder was flying. He got a glimpse or two, and his ears told him still more, and a moment later he and the other crows were in pursuit, now over, now in the trees. The owl made for the deepest

and largest forest on the mountain, a stand of virgin hemlocks in a steep, wild ravine, and until daylight came the crows were almost helpless, though they kept up a loud rumpus overhead, and dashed down as near as they dared. Jim, however, and two or three more of the leaders, wasted no time here. Like the messengers in the poem, they rode forth, to east and west and south and north, to summon their array. The dawn was just reddening the east, and the stars growing faint, as Jim sped northward, flying hard and low, not seventy-five feet over the tree tops, and cawing as he went. Two miles beyond he woke a little flock of crows in some pines in a swamp, and glancing back saw them headed for the mountain. He did not pause, however. On and on he sped, swinging now five miles to the east, then five miles to the west, then back into his course, and always seeing out of the corner of his eye some band of crows leaving for the spot whence he had come. The sun was full up before he turned at last, feeling that he had roused minute men enough, and himself returned to the mountain, now but a blue-green dome on the southern

horizon. Meanwhile, a farmer's boy, getting up very early to milk the cows, had seen a strange sight. He had heard an excited cawing overhead, and looking up had seen one crow flying north. Before long (he was milking the cows in a corner of the night pasture), he saw half a dozen crows headed south, flying hard and low. Then more came over, and more, and more. In groups of two, or ten, or even twenty, they came, always flying hard and low, headed south, and to his ears, very faintly, for the mountain was three miles away, came from somewhere up its sides now a ceaseless noise as of a thousand hoarse throats shouting.

The minute men were arriving. The battle was on!

When Jim got back to the scene of action he could see from afar sudden explosions of crows up from the tree tops, as if black fragments of a great blast were being ejected into the air. This guided him directly to the spot, even if there had been no uproar. From one to two thousand crows were in the hemlocks, and flattened against a trunk, protected from above by an overhanging

limb, or now and again trying to beat its way to another tree, but still holding the dead crow it had captured in its talons, the great owl, half blinded now by the daylight and the incessant swarm of live crows that attacked it, was plainly visible—and plainly uncomfortable. Neither one crow nor all the crows together dared risk open combat. But they all beat in waves around it, made dashes for its head, its back, drove it again and again to cover, and again and again worked it out of cover by attacks from above till it had to fly, giving them fresh opportunity to strike at its head from the air. All the morning the battle raged, the mountain echoed to the hoarse roar of the myriad cawings, till at last the battered owl managed to find an old tree that was hollow, and get inside, where he could easily defend the opening. Still hundreds of crows remained on the scene, and it was not till darkness again fell that he could make his escape. The next morning the farmer's boy heard only the usual friendly and cheerful and familiar caws of the crows that lived about his farm, and the distant forest was quiet. The owl

THE GREAT OWL WAS PLAINLY VISIBLE — AND FLAINLY UNCOMFORTABLE

had gone. With it had gone the hosts of the minute men, dispersed back to their homes. Jim led his family down to the fields in security once more, but he puffed his feathers a bit, and made his morning caws a bit more energetic and strident than usual. He felt he'd done a pretty good job, and acted as a real leader should. He was rather inclined to think he ought to be listened to respectfully by the other crows after this!

When autumn came a slight difference of opinion developed in the domestic circle. Mrs. Jim, who had spent the first (and only) winter of her life south, was all for migrating. Jim, who knew no other home than this Berkshire mountainside and the valley below, and who loved it, was strong for staying right there, in spite of his memories of the great blizzard. But you know how such disputes are usually settled. They went south. They rose into the air one chill November day, followed by several of the other crows of their neighborhood, and joined a flight going by overhead.

That evening Jim saw the ocean for the first time—at least, he saw Long Island Sound, and

across Long Island was the open sea itself. They got good food for a week or more on the grain fields of Long Island, and then cut across the open sea itself on a short flight to New Jersey, and worked on down, getting tasty sea food along the bay shores, till they scattered over the fertile fields of Virginia, roaming a little restlessly and chiefly intent on food. It was early in March that Jim felt the call of the north again too strong to resist, and gathering a small band, set out for the return journey, keeping step as he moved with the ploughed fields. The band, picking up other flocks on Long Island, crossed the Sound one fine day late in March, warmed by the south wind and finding the air "bumpy," as the aviators say, so that they rose high over the water to get into easier going, and headed toward the hills.

But up in the hills they found the fields were not yet plowed at all, and they met, too, a counter, chill wind from the north. Jim was disputing the leadership with two or three old timers, but there was no dispute now about what to do. They all descended into a thick woods, to have shelter from the coming storm they sensed, and

to find food around the rotted logs and stumps, and under the forest mould.

The storm came that night. It was the most unseasonable storm the oldest crow, or the oldest man, could remember. The north wind rose to ninety miles an hour. The snow and sleet cut like a knife. The cold was almost as intense as in winter. Great trees crashed down in the forests. The frozen sleet and snow covered all food as in a case of steel. All the next day the storm raged, and no birds could ride it even to search for food. On the second morning, the wind abated, the snow ceased, and Jim and his comrades, venturing out. hunted for food along the edges of streams, and anywhere else they could think of. They saw scores of song sparrows and robins dead on the ground, and they themselves were weak, nor could they find much to eat, so coated was everything with sleet and snow.

Then Jim thought of a certain rocky pasture slope and quarry side, in his old home land, which lay entirely on a southern hillside, protected by pine woods from the north wind. Even in midwinter the snow lay light here, and there were

hundreds of low bushes which bore a nourishing seed that clung till the following season before dropping. He had often fed there. He rose now, spiraling high, till he got his bearings, and then called to the flock. The food call was enough; nobody could dispute a leadership which took them to food in a crisis. The flock rose, rather feebly, and followed, gathering in others as they went. For three long hours they flew, their numbers constantly augmented, till it was a black band of a thousand birds which dropped down behind Jim into the pasture, and blackened the thin coating of snow on the ground, as they fed their fill.

That night they all roosted in the pines, and for another day they fed on this slope, while the snow melted a little. The second night they followed Jim over to the mountain where his nest had been, and roosted in the forest there. The following day, having stripped the pasture, they fished the banks of Jim's brook, explored the trees and stumps in the wood, investigated at the bottoms of all the old apple trees in the valley orchards, and cleaned up the food supply. To-

ward six o'clock Jim rose high once more, over the pines on the mountain, calling—the call now of the acknowledged leader. Not far to the northeast—perhaps twenty miles—was a forest he had once visited, with just such a pasture as this one here lying under its protection. By the time they had cleaned that the snow would surely be melted again, for already the wind was veering into the south and in the west the clouds were breaking.

Jim took his bearings, cawed once more a few sharp, short commands, and flying low, at an altitude of about three hundred feet, with steady wing beat, he headed in an airline for his destination. Mrs. Jim flew just behind him, almost at his side. By twos and threes and tens and scores, spread out in irregular formation, but making as a whole a perfectly straight though somewhat broken black ribbon across the sky, the great flock of crows rose from their perches in the forest, from the stream banks, the pastures, and followed him. The same farmer's boy was out in the fields as Jim went overhead. He saw the long line coming on behind, and he saw that Jim had disappeared into

the northeastern twilight while the crows were still coming from the southwest. Being of an inquiring mind, he pulled his dollar watch out of his pocket, and timed the procession. The last two stragglers passed over his head a full fifteen minutes after the leader had vanished.

"Gosh!" he said aloud, "I'm glad all them crows ain't goin' to stay here! Wouldn't have no corn at all!"

Then he watched the tail of the procession vanish into the gray northeast, and his eyes grew big. He wondered how it felt to be up there in the free air, winging at such speed far over the earth. He thought the crows were like a vast fleet of aeroplanes, going forth to bomb some distant city, and the first crow, the leader, who had gone cawing over him, fifteen minutes before, was the general in command, giving his orders and flying in advance, as a general should.

"Gosh!" he reflected, "it must be great to be a general!"

That was just what Jim thought, too, as his wings beat steadily and his eyes reached out into the gathering twilight, looking for the haven where his thousand followers could feed.

CHAPTER VI

THE MATING OF BROWNIE

IT wasn't far from the home where Brownie was born that land is sometimes worth $5,000 an acre, and men and women of the world of "fashion" build Italian villas and French Renaissance châteaux amid the Yankee maples and pines and chestnuts of the Berkshire Hills. Yet Brownie's home was quite as comfortable as any of these, though architecturally it might be described, perhaps, as pre-neolithic, with pronounced aquatic influences. It was designed and built by Brownie's father and mother. The front door was under water, which effectively discouraged tramps, beggars, soap and sewing-machine peddlers, book agents and even loan drive canvassers and strange dogs. The front hall, as a consequence, was a trifle damp, but once up-stairs into the parlor, sleeping-room, dining-

room and nursery combined, the house was found to be snug and cosy, with sanded floors (as well as sanded walls and ceiling). In short, it was a roomy and well made otter den, in a bank of a clear, rather deep brook which flowed through sandy flats, overhung with alders and willows, with wild cucumber and clematis, on its way to the near-by Housatonic.

Nobody knew the den was there—nobody, that is, on the ground above, though the muskrats which passed up and down the brook were aware of it, and hurried by, and the fishes, perhaps, knew it, though they are silly things sometimes and don't always pay attention to such matters. Brownie's father and mother were comparative strangers in these parts themselves, having spent the previous winter under the ice in Goose Pond, twenty miles away, and only came here with the breaking up of the ice, to rear their family on a waterway which gave them ready and safe access both to the river and to a large, well-stocked pond which the brook drained. In the fields and woods above, hunters pursued foxes, boys chased woodchucks, the deer, the grouse, the pheasants, the

rabbits, lived in danger. Traps were even set along this very brook for muskrat. But few were the hunters who suspected that otters were about, and fewer still the hunters or trappers who knew how to capture them. Brownie and his brother and sister arrived in a home that was hidden beneath the ground, with two strong, energetic parents to look after them, beside a brook that led to fishing grounds so well stocked that the lengthening shadow of the high cost of living cast no gloom across the domestic hearth. There was no reason at all why they should not have been chubby, contented, good-natured youngsters.

As a matter of fact, they were.

It wasn't long before their parents decided the time had come to teach them to swim. If there is one thing an otter can do better than anything else (or anyone else, for that matter), it is to swim. He can swim down a pickerel, for example, which would undoubtedly land him the captaincy of the swimming team if he went to college. If he was a lady otter, he might get a better job in the movies than Annette Kellermann, for he swims as gracefully as she, which

leaves little more to be said. Yet, in spite of this fact, a baby otter, unlike a duckling, is mortally afraid of his first plunge. When the hour struck for their lesson, Brownie and his brother and sister had to be urged firmly, if not gently, downstairs into the moist front hall, whence they were propelled out into the brook. The first thing they did on reaching the brook was to make a mad scramble for their parents' shoulders, and finding their parents brutally unresponsive, they splashed to shore as best they could, climbed up the bank, and squatted there, very wet and astonished and miserable.

This would never do. Pa and Ma Otter came up after them, grabbed one apiece and mutually cuffed the third, till all three babies once more went splashing into the dread element below. This seems like a rough way to be taught to swim, and is not practiced at our best summer resorts. But it worked. By the time the cubs were the size, say, of rabbits, they were fully qualified for the metropolitan championship, and they were more at home in the water than out of it. They swam and played till they were tired, and then

there was always mother's back, or father's back, to climb upon for a rest, while the amiable parent did the swimming.

No doubt when you were a boy you "went in" at the old swimming hole, and you like to think about it now, recalling those happy days and believing that nobody ever had such a good time. But Brownie and his brother and sister had just as good a time, if not a better one. They had just as good a time in the water and on the bank. They could go in before breakfast, if they liked. They could stay in as long as they pleased. They didn't have any shirts to take off, nor stockings to pull on over wet, sandy feet (usually causing a rent or a dropped stitch and later parental wrath). They could dive without getting water in their noses, and stay under indefinitely without getting ringing in the ears and suffocation. They could see under water without making their eyes smart, too, and if they got hungry they could chase and catch a fish.

A modified form of water polo was one of their favorite pastimes, which frequently was converted into football on top of the bank. They

played this with a stick, and would have reminded you strongly of frisky dogs, if you had been lucky enough to have seen them. Brownie not only loved to dive up under a floating stick, seize it in his powerful little teeth, and swim with it to his brother or sister or mother, for them to grab the other end, but he would play with the stick when he was all alone, letting the current carry it away from him and darting on it again, swimming on his back and tossing it up in his paws, shaking and worrying it in his mouth, and so on. Up on the bank, the cubs played still more like little dogs—dogs with long bodies and almost invisible short legs, and pointed tails very big at the base. They tugged and wrestled with a stick, bracing and pulling and falling over.

But they had other pastimes, too. Tobogganing and diving combined was one of them. An otter is exceedingly well built for tobogganing. He has a long neck which he can raise up for the curl of the toboggan. He has a long, smooth-furred body (no fur is better than an otter's, except a seal's—and the seal is his cousin), with legs so short that he can get them easily out of the

way. Finally, he has a heavy flat tail, large at the base, to act as a rudder. Altogether, he doesn't need a toboggan made of ash boards; his own tummy does very nicely. So Brownie and his playmates found. Hunting out a spot where the stream had cut into the deep, alluvial loam of the meadows, making a high, steep bank, they simply went head foremost over the top, giving themselves a helping shove with their hind feet, and slid, splash! into the water. Then out they scrambled, and did it all over again. After an hour of this sport, they would wear a regular little toboggan slide into the bank, about sixteen or eighteen inches wide, and smooth as glass where their wet bodies had converted the bottom into mud. Nor were Pa and Ma Otter in the least averse to shooting this chute, either. In fact, they often joined in the sport with all the zest of the village deacon on a spree at Coney Island, their dignity quite forgotten.

But their caution was not forgotten. Let someone be heard approaching through the fields, or a dog barking near by, and Pa Otter would go down the slide with a bark of warning, followed

by Ma and the children, and if any dog did get to the spot, if only a second later, he looked down upon a calm and silent swimming pool, with only a ripple or two to break the surface.

"Get under water, and be quick about it!"—that was a lesson Brownie soon learned, at any sign of danger. Once under water, he feared nothing.

There were, to be sure, some things in the water he didn't particularly like, chief among them the big German carp which inhabited the polluted waters of the Housatonic River. It is to be feared that neither Brownie nor his parents read the *New York Tribune,* so they didn't hate the German carp because they were told to. Their objection was based strictly on dietary grounds. The carp were tough and strong. Brownie much preferred just what you would prefer—trout, pickerel, bass, perch, eels. Now and then, to get into streams where these real fish were to be found, Brownie and his family had to swim up or down the Housatonic, and here they encountered the carp, as well as the sewage from certain of the Berkshire towns which so proudly boast their

cleanliness and beauty. How Brownie hated that filthy water! The carp alone lived and throve in it, and he would pick out and chase down a big one just out of spite, to vent his ill feelings toward pollution in general. But, unless he was very hungry, he would not eat so much as a mouthful of his kill.

It was rather up in the pond above the den that Brownie best enjoyed fishing. Here were lily pads and pickerel weed and arrowhead growing out from the shore, and here the long, lean pickerel hovered and darted like wraiths under the water—like wraiths to you or me in a canoe above, looking down into a dim half-world as through brown glass, but real enough to Brownie as he, too, swam below the surface. He would swim down the darting fish, heading it off from deep water again and again, driving it steadily in shore, till presently there was no way for the pickerel to turn without giving Brownie a chance to close in on him. Then, with the fish in his mouth, the otter would raise his keen, bright, intelligent eyes and his flat muzzle and his comical whiskers, slowly above the water and the weeds, to look

about. Slowly his long, glossy brown neck would follow, as he raised his head still higher. Satisfied that no danger was near, he would sink back, swim on the surface, or even wade, perhaps, to shore, and sitting on the bank, sink his sharp teeth into the firm, tender meat of his prey. After all, you and I cannot call him cruel, not, at least, with good grace. We, too, eat pickerel, and we catch them not in a fair chase, speed pitted against speed, but by deceit and a barbed hook. Besides, we could live on vegetables and bread and butter if we had to, but Brownie couldn't. It was fish or starve, for him. We—that is, Man—talk a great deal about the cruelty of Nature, and how one animal preys on another, as if they lived in a different world from ourselves, calmly ignoring the fact that we too are a part of Nature, an animal part, and perhaps the most cruel of all.

There came presently a great day in the life of Brownie and his brother and sister. Pa and Ma Otter announced a trip to distant parts! The children, when you come to think of it, had seen very little of the world, especially the world above

the river banks. They had been up and down the river a few miles, and up and down tributary brooks, into small lakes and ponds, but except when they played on the top of the banks and saw from that height distant hills and woods and blue things called mountains, they knew the world chiefly as two banks rising over their heads on either side of the water, banks clothed with mild water pepper plants, trailing balsam apples, bright jewel weed, blue vervain like little candelabra, drooping willows, brilliant cardinal flowers. It was a pretty world, to be sure—no gardens are fairer than those of the river bank. Yet the children hankered, as young folks will, for adventure, for new sights and sounds, and great was their excitement when the expedition started. Its real object, one suspects, was a better food supply, for five otters can pretty well fish a stream in a summer, but that didn't lessen the fun any for Brownie and his brother and sister.

Pa Otter led the way, and they swam up their brook two miles into the lake, and then a mile to the upper end of the lake, and then two miles more up a smaller brook, which emptied into it,

until at length the brook grew so shallow and came tumbling down such a steep place, over rocks and over great hemlock roots, that they could swim no more, but had to wade and climb. This was all new to Brownie and the other children, who had never been beyond the lake. The cold, clear, sweet mountain water was new to them, and the great, cool, deep forest overhead, through which Pa Otter was leading the way so cautiously, ever alert and watchful now, for the deep pools were few and far between in which they could find sure refuge from danger. At last the pools grew so shallow that it seemed as if the brook were in danger of disappearing, and Pa ordered a halt till night, before they hazarded the land crossing. The family scattered to hunt trout in the shadows under the hemlock roots, where the cold water lay still and brown. Brownie found splashing around in one of these pools after a trout rare sport, though the fish was hardly a mouthful when you got him.

At twilight the march was resumed. The brook did, presently, disappear altogether, seeming to shrink into mossy springs in the mountain-

side, and for the first time in his life Brownie found himself traveling over unknown dry land, with no water at all near by into which to plunge for safety. Overhead was the great, dim mystery of the forest. All around, in the trees, in the laurels, on the forest floor, whispered the Unknown. Brownie was afraid. He pulled himself up and forward on his short legs as fast as he could, keeping close to his mother. But Pa Otter seemed to know what he was about, following a trail so dim that to you or me, probably, even in full daylight, it would have been invisible. This trail wound up the mountainside avoiding all stumps and rocks by going under or around them, taking always the easiest way, for an otter does not relish the labor of pulling his long, heavy body over any more obstructions than he has to. Once over the divide, the trail went rapidly down, and at every possible point Pa and Ma and all the children tobogganed on their bellies.

Pa stopped presently with a warning signal. He scented danger. Quickly Ma drove the children ahead of her, so that she brought up the end of the procession and they proceeded again with

redoubled caution. Yet the scent of danger, if no sound of it, went with them—the pungent scent of fox. Big Reddy, wandering that night over the slopes, was trotting on padded paws on their trail, now behind, now beside them, wondering how he could cut out one of the young otters without risking a tussle with the parents, whose teeth he greatly respected. At last, he thought he saw his chance, and made a spring for Brownie's sister. But it was no rabbit he was attacking, even in size. The young otter, with surprising agility for an animal apparently so ill adapted for land operations, reared and met his spring with bared, angry teeth, so that he did not catch her back after all. Like light, Pa and Ma Otter closed in on him, and Big Reddy, who was looking for a supper, not a fight, disappeared into the blackness of the forest.

It all happened so quickly that Brownie hardly knew what had occurred. He only knew he was trembling, and that his sister was bleeding about the face—he smelled the warm blood—and that he wanted to get to water and plunge in where it was safe. Pa Otter hurried faster now, and the

children were almost ready to drop with weariness when at last came the sound of water falling, the sound and the sweet, clean smell of it! Five minutes later they all fell into the pool below the big spring which gushed from the base of a ledge, and began a rapid descent, through more cold pools and over slippery rocks, while the water deepened, and through the dim forest overhead the sky grew rosy.

That day they came into a shadowed pond in the woods, with a bottom of black mud, the accumulation of ages of leaf mould, and here they found horned pout in profusion, and, better yet, eels! There were so many horned pout that they never bothered to eat a whole one, merely taking a bite from the tenderest, meatiest part. That night, weary and well fed, Pa led the way to a steep, overhanging bank, where there was room for all the family in the mould and sand just above the water and under a sort of thatch of matted roots and sod. He knew this place of old, and here they curled up in safety, and slept. Brownie was glad to sleep, you can be sure. His legs ached, and he had the heaviness of food upon

him. He didn't even stop to think about foxes. Besides, he knew now his father and mother could take care of any fox. He just went to sleep.

The family went a long way on this expedition, and Brownie saw much of the world. But three things stood out, above all, in his memory of it. First, there was the big lake they came to, with a great wire screen across the inlet, so they had to climb out and walk around. In this lake were great, swift fish, like none Brownie had ever chased before, big, fighting fish that were not to be captured without a long, arduous pursuit and sometimes almost a fight at the end, but which were so delicious that they were worth all the trouble. In a word, salmon! The State had carefully imported them, and put them in this lake, for the benefit of fishermen. Well, Brownie was a fisherman, and he was duly grateful, though he had paid none of the taxes—which is rather human, after all.

The second thing which stood out in his memory was a vast river, flowing so wide and deep that it seemed like a moving lake, with strange

things on the banks, known to us as factories and cities. Past these, the family hurried fast, swimming in mid-stream. Then, at last, the water changed. It wasn't pollution, it wasn't foul—it was salt! Brownie felt a strange sensation come over him at the first sting of that salt. He wanted to swim on and on, and meet it, get deeper into it. He knew not why or what, but something seemed to call him out, out, toward the salt. His father, however, ordered a return. He didn't particularly care for the fish they now caught.

But the third thing was the most wonderful of all. He saw other otters! All his childhood, he had seen only his father and mother and brother and sister, but on this trip he learned that there were otters who did not belong to his family, and in one little, forest-fringed pond was a family just the size of his, with two girl otters in it, who were most attractive and not at all unfriendly when Brownie met them as he was chasing a perch. In fact, he gave one of them part of the fish (I am afraid after taking a bite himself out of the tender part behind the head), and later they played on the bank with a stick for about an

hour. Somehow, this was one of the happiest hours of the whole trip, and Brownie thought often about it as Pa Otter slowly, by easy stages, led the way back up the streams and finally over the divide and into the home country once more.

Winter was coming on now, and the parents decided to spend the cold season up in the pond at the brook head above the den. Long before Christmas the pond was frozen over, and Brownie, while he was under the ice, as he was much of the time, moved in a strange, dim world, especially after the snow came and covered the ice so thickly that little light could penetrate. Down there, it was like the long winter night of the Esquimaux. The water, of course, was perfectly still but the mud on the bottom stirred now and then sluggishly as a turtle moved, or a muskrat went past. The fish were none too numerous, and Brownie and his family had sometimes to chase the muskrats for food, though they were a last resort. However, there were certain airholes in the ice, and both at the outlet and up the inlet the water remained open, so they could escape from the pond when the weather was good, and

clad in their thick furs make overland journeys to other ponds and streams. Out on the snow their long bodies made a distinct trail, for their short legs sunk in so deep that their bellies dragged. Breaking trail was hard work, but those who followed the leader had less trouble, and coming home the trail had usually frozen and was easy to walk in. Wherever it led down hill, all Brownie had to do was to slide—real tobogganing, this time, on an icy chute!

That winter the first tragedy occurred to the family. Brownie's brother, swimming around alone under the ice, saw distant light, as if a new airhole had been made, and went toward it. As he drew near, he saw a small fish shining in the water in the descending shaft of light. He darted on it, and took it in at one mouthful. But, even as his jaws closed, he felt a sharp pain, and a second later, in spite of his most powerful efforts at resistance, he was pulled right up through the hole. Brownie and Pa Otter arrived just in time to see him mysteriously disappearing. Swimming around the hole in grief and perplexity, they heard sounds of human speech above, a

dull blow, and then another small fish appeared, lowered through the hole on an almost invisible line. Brownie, who was hungry, made toward it, but his father, quick as a flash, dove in between and butted him away. He had seen the line, and suspected mischief. Very warily, he nosed the fish by the tail, smelled that it was fresh though dead, and nibbled it carefully. It was suddenly yanked up out of reach!

Brownie looked on in surprise.

Again it came down, and Brownie and his father each nibbled, at either end, keeping their mouths away from the line and the hook which they now detected. Each managed to get a morsel before it was again yanked up. This time the voices above the ice were loud and angry. Pa Otter turned tail and swam away, his son following. That was Brownie's first experience with the wiles of man, though the fisher was probably more surprised than the otter was when he pulled Brownie's poor brother up on his line. If it had been Brownie's last experience, this would be a different story.

The ice had gone from the lake when Brownie

found himself thinking harder than ever of the otters he had met on the long trip the season before. He was full grown now, a fine, sleek fellow, and he had a sudden great desire to see those otters again, to play with them, to be with them, or with one of them, at any rate. He confided his plans to nobody, not even his mother, which proves that he was a regular young fellow, now. But early one morning he started out, all alone, over the long trail.

Though he had made the trip but once before, and partly in the dark, he had no doubts about the way, finding the track as a woodsman or an Indian follows his dim blazes in the forest. No fox molested him now, for he was too large for a fox to risk a contest. But, as he was descending on the farther side of the divide, he heard a hound baying on his track, and though he hurried as fast as his short legs would carry him, the dog was up before he could reach water. Brownie instinctively backed up against a flat-sided boulder, and let the dog come on. As the dog closed in, quite unconscious of what he was tackling, Brownie reared his powerful neck with incredible speed,

and closed his teeth. The dog tore and struggled to escape and get a hold on him, but he only reared higher and threw his whole weight forward, twisting his neck at the same time to bring the hound down under him. He had a hold on the dog's throat, and when the hunter arrived some moments later, he found only his dead hound on the torn moss and trampled ferns, and an otter's tracks leading away. He ran as fast as he could follow them, but they ended in the brook. Brownie was on his safe way now to the pond below.

He slept that night where the family had slept before, he tasted delicious salmon again in the lake farther on, and presently he reached the wooded pond where his friends had lived. This, he hoped, was his journey's end, and he at once began circling the shores, rearing his head over the water to look at the banks, diving under to search amid the weeds. But no friends did he see. He came at last upon the under water entrance to a den, and entered it boldly. But nobody was there. For two days he swam about that pond, and up and down the outlet, looking

for otter signs, or for some otter trail leading away overland and freshly used. He had about decided to move on, down-stream, perhaps toward the great river and the queer salt water, when quite suddenly, in mid-stream, at the outlet mouth, he met one of his friends—the prettier one, too!—coming up-stream.

The two circled each other rather shyly. Then Brownie climbed the weedy bank, and began searching for a stick, while his friend stood in the shoals, her head raised, watching him. Finally he found one, came back with it, entered the water, and invited her to play. She took a tentative bite, then a harder one, and yanked. The pull of her strength against his excited him. He began to frisk and splash, and show off his powers as a swimmer. All the time she watched him, and sometimes followed him about. Finally a fine fish went past, and Brownie dove for it, bringing it up in triumph in his mouth, and shaking it before her. It may well be that at this sign of his ability to provide that she smiled. At any rate, they swam off into deep water, and not long after they might have been seen by the muskrats

and the fish making a den entrance into the soft bank.

They were certainly two fine children that Brownie and his mate drove into the water and taught to swim. It was a real pleasure to catch fish for them, to ride them around the pond on one's shoulders, to pull on a stick with, to cuff and push down the bank. Brownie spent a happy summer in that quiet, wood-shadowed pond, but he didn't forget the fun he had as a boy on the first long trip abroad, and he took his family more than once adventuring, especially up into the lake where the salmon were. It was in this lake that he and his mate decided to winter. But before winter really set in Brownie had a desire to go once more over the divide, and see his old home pond. If he wanted to show off his progeny to their grandparents, who can blame him? I don't say he did—but, anyhow, he led the way over the long trail. A light November snow had fallen the night before they crossed, and the family left a trail a born and bred New Yorker could have followed through the woods. They couldn't help it, of course, and, indeed, they had no conscious-

ness of danger in so doing. The enemies Brownie knew were dogs and such on land, and fish-hooks under the ice in winter, and he no longer feared either. Yet that trail was to prove fatal, for it was seen by the man whose hound Brownie had killed, and seen at almost the exact spot where the fight had occurred. Thus the man knew this was a regular otter crossing. He went home and got a trap.

It was several days later that Brownie and his family returned over the trail. The snow had partly melted now, but there was still enough in the woods so they could toboggan, and they were having a great good time descending the slope. Brownie had, for once, gone off the trail a few feet to investigate something which interested him—it was a ruffed grouse nestled in a bed of dead leaves, and he wasn't quick enough to catch it, only to send it whirring off through the trees with a startling sound which caused the two young otters to jump. Mother Otter had slid on ahead, being intent on getting back to water, and suddenly she gave a cry of pain and Brownie, springing to her, found her fast in the grip of a

strange iron thing, which was chained fast to a log drag and resisted all her frantic tugs and lurches. Helpless and terrified, he and the children stayed by her, watching her agonized and pathetic efforts to free herself, till at length they heard a dog bay, and, as the dog drew near, the crack of undergrowth from a man's steps. Brownie could have handled the dog, he knew, but a man was a different proposition. To save the children, he had to lead them rapidly down the trail to the brook. Behind him, far off, just as the three plunged to safety, he heard a faint cry from his mate—and then the yelp of a dog—and silence.

It was very lonely under the ice that winter for Brownie, in spite of the two young ones. They were getting full grown now, every hour, and needed no care. Toward spring they began to wander off, as young folks will, and leave him quite alone. He, too, went off by himself, though never back over the long trail. That way he never wanted to take again. Finally, even the taste of salmon paled. He grew more lonely and more restless. Both children had disappeared.

He felt sure they had gone looking for mates. A mate! That was what he wanted. It is written that it is not good for man to dwell alone. The same, no doubt, is true of otters. Poor Brownie had tasted the cup of wedded happiness, and therefore his loneliness was doubly acute. He climbed one morning out of the lake at the outlet, slunk overland around the wire screen, took to the stream again, and swam rapidly downward toward the pond in the woods. He remembered that his dead mate had had a sister. If she were wedded now, no doubt there would be a daughter. Perhaps this daughter would look like her aunt. So lonely widowers have reflected since time was!

CHAPTER VII

THE TAMING OF OL' BUCK

IT must be admitted that, from one point of view, he who is to be our hero, and who came to be known by the name of Ol' Buck, as you shall learn, began life rather badly. But so did Joseph; only Joseph was thrown into a pit, while our hero, while yet a little fawn with speckled flanks, fell into one. However, the means of getting there matters to the chap at the bottom rather less than the means of getting out. In Joseph's case, the agency that got him in was a band of particularly unfraternal brothers. In our hero's case—and we might as well begin calling him Ol' Buck at once, especially as the name is so ludicrously inappropriate to the little fawn he was at the time,—the agency was a Hill Billy. A Hill Billy is, normally, a citizen of the commonwealth who lives on a rundown farm or cabin up in the mountain country where the towns were

prosperous a hundred years ago, but later slid down to the valleys when the railroads came, leaving mostly the shiftless, the infirm, the feeble-minded, to repopulate the hills. So far as the hills have been repopulated—which isn't very far—it has been by the shiftless, the weak-willed, the feeble-minded. The result to-day is the Hill Billy.

Now, some Hill Billies catch woodchucks along in August, when they are well-grown and fat, and salt down the meat in barrels, for winter consumption. Why not? The meat tastes "as good as chicken," they say. But that is neither here nor there. What matters just now is that other Hill Billies are partial to venison, and there is only one game warden to a great many square miles of wild country. It's risky, of course, but life at best is a risky proposition. So all the salt put out in the upland pastures isn't for the ranging cattle, and Wilbur Bailey, being shy on ammunition and still shyer on cash, as well as on brains, as you may infer, refrained from shaving for the sixth consecutive morning and went out to a certain dim deer run he knew of, on his ancestral

acres, and there digged a pit (where nature had aided him by an old erosion gully), across which he placed boughs and bait in the shape of a lump or two of salt, a few oats and several juicy leaves of Swiss chard from his wife's weedy vegetable garden. Wilbur Bailey didn't care for vegetables himself, certainly not enough to weed 'em. He preferred meat.

But Wilbur's toil (considerable enough to have cultivated a large corn field) availed him less than he hoped (as well as more than he expected), from two causes. One cause was biological—an adult deer's ability to jump out of a hole. The second cause was international. It would be too long a story to tell how the Polacks first came into the hills, buying abandoned farms, or even how the Hill Billies, Yankees all, scorned them, and how feuds arose over tumble-down fences and consequent incursions of Polish kine. Suffice it to report that young Ignace Raufkowsky, a son of Wilbur's next neighbor down the road, and whose father was even then "at law" with Wilbur over a fence, had learned a thing or two during his "Americanization" process, besides how

to spell " cat " and sing the Star-Spangled Banner. He saw Wilbur go into the woods with a shovel, and he went, too—at a discreet distance. After Wilbur had departed from his baited pit, a black-eyed, sharp face might have been seen rising over a fern-draped boulder. The Raufkowskys had no telephone, but the Wojtyniaks had, two miles down the hill. Ignace took off his shoes to save leather, and walked down the hill. At the Wojtyniaks' he called up Bill Snyder, the game warden. Score one for the Raufkowskys, in the fence case!

It was hardly more than daybreak the next morning when Wilbur set forth once again into the woods, armed this trip with a long knife and a piece of rope. As he drew near his pit, he quickened his pace into a run, for he heard distinctly the sound of thrashing amid boughs, and also something very like a cry of distress. He sprang out of the bushes over the brow of the gully where his pit was dug, and as he sprang the bushes parted on the other side, and he looked squarely into the steel-gray eyes of Bill Snyder. Young Ignace, having the future in mind, when

Bill Snyder would be far away, was not visible just then.

"Hello, Wilbur, what you doing here?" asked Bill.

"I heard a noise, and I was comin' to see what it was," said Wilbur, sneaking a glance down into his pit, where a little mottled fawn was whimpering.

"Well, you come with me, and I'll tell you all about it." Bill spoke quietly, with an engaging smile.

"Aw, no, Bill, honest to God, I didn't know nothin' about ——"

He turned his head quickly, as if to estimate the chances to make a break.

But the game warden was beside him, with two long strides. The edge of a hard hand hit his wrist, and the knife fell from his pained fingers.

"Now I'll take the rope," said Bill, quietly, as he picked up the knife. "I advise you to stand right there." And he let his hand wander a second toward his hip.

Wilbur stood right there, while Snyder got into the pit and tussled with the terrified little fawn

till he had his legs tied together. Then he slung him head down on a pole, and making Wilbur take an end, they carried him to a wood road, where a Ford was standing. They put him in the rear on a blanket, and Snyder ordered his prisoner up on the front seat. Presently Ol' Buck was inside Snyder's chicken fence, being coaxed by Mrs. Snyder to feed out of a baby's bottle, and Wilbur was on his way to face the district judge. His fate no longer concerns us. Suffice to say the punishment was terrible—he had to work all winter to pay off his fine.

Meanwhile Ol' Buck easily mastered the bottle art, and throve lustily. He frisked his absurd bit of white tail all about the yard after a few days, butted anybody who came near him (except Mrs. Snyder and Bill, his bottle bearers), and was admired of all the neighborhood, and later of all the county, for Bill took him to the county fair in a little wooden pen, where he was almost as much a centre of attraction as the horse races.

But as time went on and Ol' Buck grew in stature, passing from the bottle stage to the lettuce and chard and hemlock bough and sumach

blossom stage, a chicken run was too small a spot in which to confine him. Snyder tried the experiment once or twice of letting him loose in the yard, but on the first occasion he jumped the fence and was chased back in terror by a dog, and on the second occasion he went into a neighbor's yard, demolished the lettuce in an open cold frame, and then knocked down the neighbor's little boy with the part of his head where his horns were going to be. After that, Snyder took him to the superintendent of one of the big summer estates, where there was a big chicken run of almost an acre, and left him there for the winter.

In spite of this rearing in captivity, which is bad as a rule for all deer and moose, because by nature they range for their food and thus keep in condition, Ol' Buck seemed to thrive, and when early spring came he had every appearance of health. He was full of ginger, too, and though well enough disposed toward the man who fed him, he not infrequently threatened to try his budding antlers on anybody else who got him into a corner.

Once a woman came to see him.

"Oh, the darling!" she cried. "Deer are such pretty, timid, gentle-eyed creatures, aren't they? Come here, you pretty little thing." And she drew near him, holding out her hand to stroke his head.

She said later, when she got her wind back, that she believed her corset steels were all that saved her.

Bill Snyder came frequently to see him, and on his last trip, the first of March, declared that in a week or two they'd set him free. But they never did.

Ol' Buck discovered one night that he had grown stronger and bigger. He went over the chicken wire, catching on the top, to be sure, and half breaking it down, and the following morning the man who fed him followed the tracks through the snow as far as the woods. That was the last he ever saw of Ol' Buck.

So far as I know, that was the last anybody saw of Ol' Buck, for two years and a half. Nobody with a gun saw him, at any rate, for he escaped either death or wounds. Yet he might have been seen, too, for he roamed the country

for many miles, and having less fear of man than his fellows in whose company he often traveled, and knowing, also, how good certain domestic products are to eat, such as apples, beet tops, the tips of young string bean vines, and succulent Swiss chard, he not infrequently came out of the woods into fields and orchards, just as the dawn was reddening, or even trod softly into the very gardens and nibbled what he liked best. It was he, I always thought, who came into my garden one morning, after a rain, so that the ground was soft and he left deep prints with his sharp hoofs, and ate the tops off an entire row of beets. He touched nothing else, stepping daintily through the strawberry bed without treading on a single vine. It took the beets the rest of the season to make new tops, and we never did get any roots from them. But I treasure no grudge. I don't particularly like beets.

However, the next authentic record we have of Ol' Buck was, as I say, two years and a half after his escape, and the circumstances were dramatic. Drama, you may recall, has been defined by Brunetière as a "clash of wills," a contest of contend-

ing desires, and it was a clash of wills, as well as a clash of horns and heads, which the cottagers on Hubbard's Pond beheld across the water one September twilight.

Do you know September twilight over a still, fresh-water pond in the woods? If you do, you have felt its mystery and charm. You have felt how night oozes from the shadows of the trees over the water close in shore, and from the trees themselves, and yet how the centre of the lake holds day still imprisoned in its placid mirror. At such an hour, on such a pond, almost anything might come from the mystery of the forest on the farther shore. What actually came on this occasion were two stags in mortal combat, followed by a doe, the cause of their bitter contention, who was curiously unaffected by the sight of the struggle, but began peacefully to browse on the bushes along the strip of beach, quite as if battles for her favors were too common to notice. The stags, however, were so intent on their battle that they could hardly have observed her attitude of uncomplimentary indifference. It is a curious thing that when men fall to fighting over a

woman they become so absorbed that they forget the woman, which perhaps explains why she regards the whole matter with indifference. "If it wasn't I, it would be something else they'd fight over," she seems to say. "Meanwhile, this is a charming piece of music"—or "a delicious sprig of hemlock," if she chances to be a doe.

But meanwhile it was serious business for the two bucks who were fighting so close to her. A slip, a wandering glance, a throat exposed, might mean death. Gentle creatures, deer? Then you never saw two bucks in action! Ol' Buck and his antagonist charged each other once along the strip of beach, and as their heads met, their horns locked, the watchers at the log cottage across the pond distinctly heard the crash of the impact. They saw one deer reel, and plunge out into the water, pulling his horns away from the grapple. He backed in up to his knees, and the other deer rushed him again. This time they met with a louder crash, and swayed their interlocked heads, pushing and thrusting, their muscles rigid, their eyes red, their breath hissing. Once more the elder deer worked free, and backed off. He was

evidently getting the worst of it, for it was Ol' Buck who, for a third time, rushed him, though he rallied and charged to meet the attack. The water splashed high as their hoofs clove it, and as they once more broke free, anyone close enough might have seen the red upon it. They were now out almost to their haunches, and could get less momentum on their next charge. Their horns did not lock, but as Ol' Buck's head crashed into and past the head of his opponent, he lunged savagely with all the power of his sleek, powerful neck, and a red gash opened along the neck of the other, clear to the shoulder. The blood ran into the water, and with a bellow of pain the defeated buck dashed out of the lake, across the beach, and disappeared into the woods.

Then the conqueror raised his head and snorted, splashing triumphantly to shore and turning toward the doe.

But she kept right on nibbling deliberately at hemlock roots.

The watchers across the lake reported that Ol' Buck appeared somewhat surprised by this indifference. It was certainly no way to treat a tri-

umphant hero, who has just done bloody battle for your sake. Ol' Buck strode rather impatiently up to the doe, but she frisked her sharp heels and her white tail disappeared, ghost-like, into the gloom of the forest. Ol' Buck followed her, at a bound, and that was the last the watchers saw.

It was as well, perhaps, if they were believers in the traditional gentleness and timidity of the deer. For what followed was not pretty, any way you look at it. It was, however, natural, and it showed, at least, that Ol' Buck was a fellow of spirit and that, deep rooted within him, was the triumphant instinct to keep his race alive. You wonder, perhaps, why the deer remain so numerous in our woods, in spite of the hunters, when fiercer, stronger animals have vanished, and even animals no less protected by law in certain seasons than the deer, are fast disappearing also. In part, at least, it is because, like Ol' Buck, the male deer are fierce to fight for their mating privileges, and strong and ruthless to insist on them.

At any rate, Ol' Buck caught up with the doe

in a small open glade, and once more approached her for a sign that she abided by the results of the battle. Once more she turned from him, indifferent—not coquettishly, he could have endured that—but with complete indifference. Ol' Buck didn't argue. He used his head, but in an extremely primitive way; he drew off, charged, hit the doe amidships, and knocked her off her feet, so that she rolled and slid up against the bushes. She got up stiffly, and tried to move away once more, but Ol' Buck was too quick for her. Again he struck her, head on, and knocked her down. Even this second emphatic token of affection, however, did not cause her to reciprocate. She got up as best she could, and a third time tried to get away. Once again Ol' Buck smote her, and once again she fell sprawling and breathless on the ground. This time she rose with still greater difficulty. The spirit as well as the breath was knocked out of her. Limp and lame, she raised large hazel eyes of acquiescence toward the still inflamed eyes of her lord and master, and signified that she was conquered. So man, also, wooed and won, it is said, in the

neolithic age. But nowadays it is not usually advisable to try such methods. Women have many weapons, from hatpins to sarcasm, and they have decreed more gentle and tactful approaches. Which only means that a deer is a wild animal, after all, and a strong, virile, pugnacious one, not the symbol of timidity and shyness he is generally pictured.

With this conquest over the older leader, Ol' Buck supplanted him as the guiding spirit of the herd which began gradually to assemble as winter drew nearer, and to work over the plain, through the swamps, toward the steep wall of the big mountain. Often the herd scattered, the fawns keeping with the does, and always they wandered far each day in search of food, not because food was hard to find, but because it was better to nibble a little here and there, with a mile canter between bites; if one ate a full meal in one place, he paid for it with a stomachache, or at the least a lessening of muscular vigor and wind. In spite of his early bringing up, in confinement, Ol' Buck knew that as well as anybody. His nose, too, was as keen as any nose in the herd.

When he stole into an orchard at the dusk of evening, or at the dusk of dawn, to nibble apples under the trees, he would take a bite and then raise his head, nuzzling the air, as it were, for scent of danger, before he stooped for the next bite. His large, soft ears, too, pricked up constantly, like a fine young dog's, and the sleek yellow coat that wrapped his haunches was like a wet silk shirt wrapped to the shoulders of an athlete, showing the powerful muscles ready for instant action. I came upon him once, greatly to his surprise, at the lower end of my orchard, directly under the mountain. It was almost Thanksgiving, and very cold, with a high wind blowing. I came up against this wind, and he neither heard nor smelled me, so that I stalked him close, screened by some bushes, and saw him bite off the top half of a frozen apple without dislodging the lower half from its contact with the ground, as I discovered on later examination. What other animal feeds so daintily? I had a flash in my pocket, which I suddenly turned full on him. He blinked great, startled eyes into the radiance for a second, then the muscles

played beneath the silken shirt, and I saw merely a white strip of tail going over the fence, from a standing start. It was a clean, beautiful jump of six feet. I have heard sporting editors liken hurdlers to deer—but they never saw Ol' Buck take a fence!

The week of legal deer hunting opened at six o'clock on December first. It is only three miles from the village, across the swamp to the first leap of the mountain, yet before the sun was up that day fifty men with guns had either passed along this road, or were stationed at various points in the swamp woods beside it. What show had Ol' Buck and his little herd against such odds? There were more than five hunters, more than ten barrels, to each deer! Well, they had one considerable advantage over the hunters—they had better ears and infinitely better noses. A hunter, if he wants a good nose, has to employ a dog, and dogs are not permitted in deer hunting in our State. As a matter of fact, when the first hunters came along the road, long before six o'clock, and struck into the swamp woods by a logging road, Ol' Buck and his little herd were

scattered over an area of two or three acres, not three hundred yards away, just beginning to browse for breakfast on the ground hemlock which grew thickly at that spot. Ol' Buck himself and two of the does on the windward side got the scent, and were off with long, easy bounds through the dim woods, where the ground was not yet frozen and they made astonishingly little noise. Not a soul saw them go, and in ten minutes they had crossed the road at the base of the mountain, and had begun to climb.

But there is one real woodsman in our town, who knows in advance what the animals are going to do. An hour earlier than any other hunter, he was out, and up the mountain, where he stationed himself down wind, not too close to a certain trail so dim that only another woodsman like himself could have detected it even by daylight. It was the trail made by the deer the winter before, now practically closed in again. He knew that at the first sign of danger the deer would be coming up this way. Presently he heard the swish and soft crashing of bushes below him, and his finger crept around the trigger of his

shotgun. It was Ol' Buck, leading his band up the mountain.

But mountain air currents are tricky things sometimes. Just at this moment a strong gust came swirling down over the summit, from the wrong direction, and Ol' Buck got the scent—the man scent, and the odd, strong odor of gun oil. He pulled up sharp, and swerved hard to the left, bounding along without climbing for two hundred yards or more, and then resuming his ascent through unbroken laurel—what in the southern mountains would be called a laurel hell. He knew well enough that once in this tangle he and his herd could outrun anything.

The man swore bitterly at the wind, and sat back to wait for another opportunity. He didn't propose to waste energy by following up this herd through the laurel and over the upper ledges.

Ol' Buck and his herd saw the red sun ball heave up over the eastern hills, from a ledge 1,500 feet above the swamp where they had started to breakfast. This ledge stretched for ten miles along the eastern flank of the great mountain,

wind swept and covered only with storm-dwarfed pitch pines, with some moss, thin, hardy grasses, and a profusion of low shrubs in the rock crannies. It was their winter feeding ground, for here the wind kept the snow blown off, and between the ledge and the peak of the mountain was an extensive forest full of evergreens for additional food, and shelter. They felt safe up here, too, since in winter it was a spot almost inaccessible, at any rate a spot where nobody ever came to disturb them.

Still, twice that morning Ol' Buck had fled from the man smell in the woods, and now he heard unpleasant explosions here and there in the distance. He kept pricking his ears nervously, and raising his muzzle to sniff the wind. The herd wandered, browsing, along the ledges till the sun was high overhead, and the noon sleepiness came upon them. The fawns and some of the does lay down, picking out spots where the dead grass made a bed in the warm sunlight, but Ol' Buck, a young yearling buck, and a doe, retraced their steps cautiously. They went for some little distance without detecting any

signs of danger, and then, suddenly, both their ears and noses got unmistakable warning. They were being followed! With a great bound, Ol' Buck led the way back to the herd. The spots where the deer had lain down to rest were still almost warm, the grass still crushed in the shape of their bodies, when two hunters reached the place. But no deer was visible! Only, by careful searching again, could the men follow the tracks into the tangle of scrub oak and laurel and blueberries and azalea, through which the deer had headed for the forests on the mountain summit. And the summit was State reservation, and Bill Snyder was the game warden!

Still, this was wild country. Bill Snyder couldn't be everywhere. It wasn't far to bring a deer out of the reservation, and then report the kill. Who'd know the difference? Their blood was up now, the trail was fresh—and they plunged in after the herd. Up here near the summit there was suddenly a little coating of snow, the precipitation of some cloud, perhaps, and the trail became easy to follow. When they reached the double tracks (for Ol' Buck, of

SUDDENLY BOTH THEIR EARS AND NOSES GOT UNMISTAKABLE WARNING

course, had once more gone back to sniff before letting the herd settle down to rest), they stalked off to leeward, and crept in as silently as they could toward an open space where they thought the deer would be napping. But even as the trees thinned, and they got a view into the opening, they saw the white tails vanishing into the opposite foliage. Raising their guns, they fired, and then sprang forward to pick up the trail. They cried aloud with joy—there was blood on the snow! Forgetful now of weariness, of tearing laurel, of slippery rocks, they almost ran along the trail. But the blood signs grew no thicker, the wounded deer did not seem to have dropped out of the herd. Up to the peak of the mountain, then over a seventy degree cliff wall, the tracks led them, and plunged into the wilderness on the farther side. Once out of the summit snow, too, the tracks grew hard to follow, and as dusk came on two weary and empty-handed men were plugging back along the rutty, frozen road to the village, their guns heavy in their hands. A poor day's work, they said.

And Ol' Buck agreed with them, with bitter-

ness and anger! One of his does had a buck shot in her hind shoulder. It had not cut a cord, to be sure, but it pained her, and made her lame and sick, and the blood had run down her leg and frozen in clots, and now she lay in the warm, thick shelter of a stand of young hemlocks, her eyes big with pain, and big with terror, too, of the unknown affliction, while the others lay or stood browsing near by, and Ol' Buck stared at her wonderingly, trying, perhaps, to clear up in his mind the mystery of association between the man smell, the explosion sound, and this wound in his doe's shoulder. At any rate, the fact of association was clear. Look out for the man smell! It means danger, pain, death perhaps!

All that week on the mountain Ol' Buck never relaxed his nervous vigilance, and never allowed the herd to go out of the deepest woods, or down the lower slopes at all, for the guns were sounding there, and up here, for some unknown reason, except for the one time when his doe was hit, no guns had been fired. Animals, of course, cannot reason. Wise men have often told us so. But,

reason or no reason, Ol' Buck could put two and two together. Humans carried guns; guns caused wounds and terror; the guns were going off down below; they weren't going off up here; why not stay up here? Q. E. D. Naturally, this isn't reasoning, because only a deer does it, not a noble, two-legged animal called Man, who shoots deer. But it has served many a deer in protecting his life and the life of his fawns, so it does well enough. And it explains, perhaps, why this story can keep on, instead of ending right here with the slaughter of the hero.

His experience that week in protecting his herd, with a wounded doe limping in his company, intensified Ol' Buck's instinctive dread of man. Though the guns presently ceased, and the winter snows came, and nobody molested them up there on the wild, wind-swept ledges, and they grew bold again and foraged down to the plain for frozen apples in the orchards, Ol' Buck was more alert than ever to scent danger on the wind, and to spring away from it into the protection of the wildest forest. When spring

came and he left the herd, to suffer alone, or, at best, with a few of his equally afflicted male companions, the ignominy of a de-antlered brow, and later when his new horns began to grow and he rubbed his itching sprouts against the smooth birches or hornbeams in the forest, wandering back into the swamps and by the refreshing pond shores, he still remembered the danger that lurks in the man smell, and he became the wariest of woodland creatures, taking his sleep in thickets moated with swamp or precipice.

That next September a young buck had the temerity to challenge him, but he was still far from being an old buck himself, and his antagonist suffered the same fate as befell his opponent the year before. The little herd was still intact, too, for though many of the fawns had now grown up and scattered, there were new ones to take their places. Race suicide is unknown among healthy deer. It is murder, not suicide, which reduces their number.

Once again, too, Ol' Buck eluded the hunters on the first day of December, and reached the mountain reservation with his herd untouched.

Then a strange thing happened, something quite new to his experience, at any rate. A great snow-storm came, without much wind even up on the exposed ledges, and the snow piled up and up, and up, till all the grass and moss and even the bushes were covered, and even the most energetic stamping and pushing along paths by the whole herd could not avail to keep the food supply uncovered. Of course, the ground hemlock was covered, too, and though there were the top shoots of saplings sticking up in the woods, and hemlock branches to eat, the food question became rather serious. Nor did this snow melt. Instead, more came, and more, till at last there were six or seven feet of it up on the mountain.

Ol' Buck led the way down, always seeking for some variety in diet, and for enough succulence in the food to supply the warmth their bodies needed. In this search, he came early one morning on a lumber slash. He heard horses champing in a stable somewhere, and caught warning odors—but he was hungry, and the cutting had brought down within reach branches of trees

which were good, especially the delicate buds of the hard woods, and boughs of hemlock and cedar. He fell upon them, and then, before day should break, he gathered others of the herd to feed. They were still feeding when they caught the sound and smell of the dread humans, and rushed away into the forest, floundering almost to their bellies in the deep snow, so that an energetic man on snowshoes could almost have run the fawns down. Such bitter going as this was too exhausting for long trips. In spite of the presence of the hated man, Ol' Buck yarded his herd not far from the lumber camp, and every night, before the dawn broke, or after the men were early asleep in the evening, he led them to the slash, where they fed. After a day or two, also, they discovered that when the horses were fed at noon, a lot of the oats spilled out upon the snow, and not all of them were picked up by the chickadees. Into these stray oats all the deer nuzzled, cleaning up each space.

But if they discovered the oats and the sweet terminal buds on the fallen tops, the lumbermen also discovered their tracks. And one of these

lumbermen was a Canuck by the name of Johnny. Johnny's command of English was largely confined to a whole-hearted but quite innocent profanity, and his arms were admittedly stronger than his head. But he had a warm corner in his heart for animals. He looked at the tracks for three days, saying nothing, and then he remarked, "I t'ink me dose deer mebbe havin' pretty hard tam."

The boss only grunted, but as Johnny was his best man with a team, he made no remonstrance when he saw him load an extra forkful of hay on the outgoing sledge.

The next morning Johnny saw that the deer had walked around the hay, without eating it. He went back at noon and brought up some salt and sprinkled it over the hay.

"Hi, Johnny, that's a salt lick—you'll have the game warden after you—twenty-five dollars fine!" somebody called.

"I t'ink no," said Johnny, with his childlike smile, continuing to sprinkle.

But the salt worked little better. Ol' Buck sniffed it, and took a lick or two, but it was

midwinter, and the salt hunger was not in him.

Again Johnny was disappointed, but he smiled cheerily.

" I t'ink I fool 'em yet! " he said, and dumped a measure of oats into the hay.

The next morning the hay was half gone, and the remainder trampled into the snow. The oats had quite disappeared.

" I t'ink dose deer, dey like oats," Johnny mused. Whereupon he proceeded to establish half a dozen feeding stations at convenient points close to the logging roads, and to disappear from the camp before the others were up in the morning, wriggling out of his bunk and into his boots with a soft smile on his face.

Soon after even the least interested of his mates began to notice that the deer were becoming tamer. Their white tails would often flash into the woods in front of the oncoming team, and at last one of them saw the leader of the herd himself, feeding up in the slash, and only running away when the horses shook their bells as they approached.

"You see heem, you see Ol' Buck?" Johnny asked. "I t'ink I mak' Ol' Buck what you call tame yet!"

The man laughed. "Swell chance!" he said. "Maybe you'll tame a fawn, though."

"Umph!" said Johnny, and kept on at his morning expeditions.

It was a Saturday that Johnny announced he was ready to give an exhibition. The big boss had come to the camp to pay off, and jokingly asked the "Frenchie" where his pet deer were.

"I get dose deer," Johnny replied, flashing white teeth under his little moustache. "I get Ol' Buck."

He filled a pan with oats and vanished into the forest. The sound of a gentle tapping on the pan floated back.

Presently Johnny himself came back. Like the Pied Piper he moved, out of the shadow into the edge of the clearing, and behind him, the forward animals nosing eagerly toward the pan, which he kept tantalizingly just ahead of them, came the entire herd, with two spring fawns almost under Johnny's heels and—yes, it was

true!—the proud horns of Ol' Buck himself looming up in the midst!

Then Johnny stopped, actually pushing the fawns from the pan, while he appeased the rest with a few handfuls of oats cast on the snow, and held the pan toward Ol' Buck's nose. Slowly, a little reluctantly, it almost seemed a little proudly, with his ears still up and his eyes alert, Ol' Buck drew close, and put his nose into the food. Johnny raised one hand and touched his neck. Quick as a flash, he reared up and sprang back a full pace, but Johnny persisted, holding out the pan again. Again Ol' Buck nuzzled into it, and this time he let Johnny's hand rest a second on his strong, beautiful neck, before he reared back his head again and withdrew a dozen feet. Then Johnny turned to the fawns, setting down his pan for the does to feed in, and putting an arm around the neck of each little deer, while his face, between theirs, laughed with inexpressible delight toward the astonished group of men below him.

Somebody shouted, and Ol' Buck, with a single spring, was faced in the opposite direction and headed for the woods. The does followed, but

the two little fawns, held fast by Johnny, only tugged their heads for a moment, and then seemed almost content to remain. He fed them the last of the oats before they, too, scampered away, like animated sawhorses.

"I t'ink dose two fawn, dey need camp," Johnny said, returning all smiles. "Little legs, dey all shiver dis way—so cold!"—and he illustrated with his own stout legs.

So Johnny built a little lean-to of hemlock boughs, not far into the woods, and bedded it with hay and baited it with oats and some carrots, and then coaxed the two small fawns into it. Once they were established there, he went out of a morning and sat between them, on the hay, while they fed out of the pan on his lap. While he was so engaged, about the third morning, he was startled by a sound, and looking up, saw Ol' Buck himself at the entrance.

"Ho!" said Johnny softly, "bon jour, Ol' Buck! So he come beg, eh? He come vera tame now, eh? He like Johnny leetle bit now, eh? He like nice breakfas'?"

Johnny held out the pan, and Ol' Buck poked

his proud, sensitive nose into it, and daintily filled his mouth while the mittened hand of Johnny touched gently, with admiration and a little awe, his branching horns. Ol' Buck shook his head angrily. He resented this familiarity. Johnny respected his feelings—and respected his horns—and withdrew his hand. But Ol' Buck did not go away. He took another mouthful of oats. After all, this was Johnny. Johnny was a man, but a different kind of man. He did not shoot—he fed. Men could be kind and friendly, as well as cruel and hostile. Ol' Buck was confronted with the same paradox which has confused the philosophers and theologians, through all the centuries—and, like them, he was making the best of it, while the kindness held out!

Would it always hold out? He did not know. Perhaps he did not wonder. He at least was sure of Johnny now—and the oats. He, the wildest, most wary of his clan, was eating from a dish held in the lap of a human! Ol' Buck was tamed.

But when the snow melted and the natural food supply was again uncovered, and the sap stirred in the maple shoots, Ol' Buck was off through his

ranges, and Johnny knew him no more. What fate is in store for him? Will his taming make him less suspicious of other men, so that he will fall a victim to their guns? Or will his instinctive wariness again assert itself, to protect him and his herd? Who can answer? I can only say that so far nobody has reported his killing; he is still ranging our woods and swamps, and watching from the lofty mountain ledges the heave of the red sun ball above the eastern world rim.

CHAPTER VIII

RED SLAYER AND THE TERROR

RED SLAYER lived in an old stone wall which ran up the hill toward the woods, dividing two peaceful pastures where in summer the cattle grazed, and in winter the field-mice made tunnels under the snow and matted grasses, radiating out in all directions to reach the richest stores of seeds and roots. From any of the innumerable holes, like little cave mouths, in his wall, Red Slayer could look out upon the world and see the pleasant countryside—the pasture slopes, the green woods above climbing up to the mountain shoulder, the road below where the wagons rattled past or the motors whizzed, the farm fields and orchards and barns and houses beyond, and the broad meadow where the brook ran half hidden in sedge and his cousins, the mink, lived well. Many tourists, going by, looked on

this scene and sighed that they could not always live amid a country so peaceful and calm and lovely. A poet has written about it. More than one artist has painted it. Yet there is no use in blinking the fact that it had no effect whatever on Red Slayer. Perhaps there is less in the theory of environment than we suppose. Not all the warlike peoples have sprung from wild and rugged lands. Certainly, among weasels, the landscape hath no charms to soothe the savage breast. Red Slayer was a regular weasel, all weasel from the tip of his sharp, keen-scented nose to the tip of his furry tail (a distance of some sixteen inches), and he regarded the landscape solely as a place in which to slay. He was a cruel beast, there can be no doubt about it, a cunning, alert, preternaturally active, sleek, pretty villain; and, as the saying goes, he got what was coming to him, which is not always the case with villains, except, of course, in the movies. But Red Slayer could never be put into a movie. The camera shutter is a quick thing, but not quick enough to capture Red Slayer!

I said that Red Slayer lived in the half tumbled

down stone wall, but that is not strictly true. Actually he lived in a hole between two roots of an old stump directly against the wall, and the wall was his commonest path to and from his dwelling. This hole had originally belonged to a chipmunk, but Red Slayer, chancing along that way on one of his wanderings (he was a great wanderer when he went hunting, often traveling many miles), had coveted it. He also coveted the chipmunk. There were two ways of getting the chipmunk; one was to go down into the hole and kill him, if he was there, the other was to wait close by, in the wall, and pounce on him when he came in or out. Red Slayer tried the hole, tentatively. It went straight down for more than a foot, and then evidently swerved at a sharp angle, to the level. It was a pretty tight fit even for his long, slender body, and promised to offer little room to work in. Not that a chipmunk has to be respected as a fighter at all, but a nipped nose isn't pleasant. So Red Slayer backed out of the hole, withdrew into the wall till his reddish-brown body was entirely invisible, and his sharp, sloe-black eyes were invisible, too, and proceeded to

wait, with the patience characteristic, in some degree, of all wild animals, but of very few humans.

Presently, if you could have seen Red Slayer's slender body, you would have seen it arch up, you would have seen his neck stretch out and upward, his sharp nose quiver almost imperceptibly. He smelled his game approaching! He had a nose more than the equal of any dog's, and sharp as were his eyes, it was his nose he chiefly relied upon when hunting. The unsuspecting chipmunk came along the top of the wall, drawing near his burrow. When he was above it he sprang down on the top of the stump. Then he jumped again, planning to land at the mouth of the hole. But he never did. Red Slayer came out of the wall like an arrow from a bow and caught him in mid-air, setting vicious teeth, with unerring aim, into his neck, and bearing him to the ground three feet away, such was the force of his spring. When they landed, Red Slayer, of course, was on top, and the poor chipmunk was too far gone to put up any real fight. One more well directed bite of those severing, tearing teeth, and his neck veins were opened. Red Slayer drank

some of the blood which flowed. He was not very hungry, as a matter of fact, but he bit open the chipmunk's skull and ate the brains. That quite satisfied him, and he turned to an investigation of the burrow.

The hole went down, he found, largely through soft earth and roots rotted to a brown pulp, so that he had no difficulty in squeezing and pounding the sides apart with his shoulders, making the tunnel large enough for his own comfort. At eighteen inches below the surface, it ceased descending, and ran along on the level, reaching in a few feet a sort of chamber. The shaft continued, apparently indefinitely, but beyond this point it entered gravel, and Red Slayer was averse to the effort required to enlarge the bore. It made a perfectly good home as it was. Moreover, as winter was coming on, the chipmunk had brought in some nice, dry, dead leaves for a bed. There was also the smell of hazelnuts in the tube—but that didn't interest Red Slayer in the least. Nothing interested him in the line of food except meat. He curled up in the leaves and took a long nap, with no more qualms of con-

science than a Prussian officer sleeping in a Belgian château.

That was how Red Slayer achieved his snug, warm home beside the gray stone wall between the peaceful pastures and below the whispering forest. The house suited him, the neighborhood suited him. He settled down to become our most undesirable citizen.

Shortly after a change began, not in his character, but in his appearance. From a pretty reddish-brown above, with a whitish shirt front and belly, and a black tail tip, he changed to a curious mottled effect, especially odd on his tail, which was black for one third, brown for one third, and white for one third—a kind of pousse-café effect. This lasted while the ground was freezing and the early snows of November flying, until gradually the white triumphed, and Red Slayer emerged from his hole one morning of white glitter and dazzle, as white as the snow itself, all except that last third of his tail, which remained a glossy black. His eyes, too, of course remained sloe-black. He was a lovely creature then, a bit of animated ermine, sleek and slim and

clean, and when he bounded over the snow about all you could see of him was his black tail tip, so white he was. A wood-chopper was going up through the pasture, and chanced to spy him, but evidently not until after Red Slayer had scented the man and seen him, too; for he was standing with all four feet on the snow, his neck upraised, his bead-like eyes fixed with suspicion yet alert curiosity upon the big creature with the ax. The man made a step toward him, and Red Slayer disappeared. The man was perplexed. It seemed utterly incredible that anything sixteen inches long could disappear from sight on a field of bare, clean snow. He peered about, and suddenly saw the black tip of Red Slayer's tail behind a tuft of dried grass which stuck up above the snow ten feet from the spot where he had first seen him. The man took another step. By keeping his eyes fixed on that black tail tip, he saw the weasel make two springs of ten feet each, his hind feet coming down almost in the tracks of his front feet, and vanish into the wall. The man let his eyes rove along the wall. In no more time than it took him to move them, Red Slayer's head, up-

raised neck, and shoulders, emerged from a hole a dozen feet from the one where he had entered, and the sloe-black, intelligent eyes met the man's in a bold, inquisitive stare. The man made another dash forward—and Red Slayer was gone. He did not see him again.

I tell this incident not because it had any effect whatever on Red Slayer, but because it shows, in large measure, why it had no effect upon him, why he was so confident of himself, so devoid of fear, so ready to tackle a bird or animal twice, three, even four times his size or weight. He had more than the quickness of a cat, coupled with better than the nose of a dog. Short as his legs were in proportion to his body, he had a leaping agility and a bodily litheness which enabled him either to attack or to escape at a tremendous advantage over his foes. When an animal can leap eight times its own length, and keep it up as a regular gait till it gets to safety, it is not in imminent danger of captivity, provided it has a nose, or eyes, or ears, sharpened to give it warning of danger. And when it can thus leap, itself almost invisible as it comes over the snow, aiming

the terrible bite of its jaws to land with the accuracy of a rifle shot, the thing aimed at is not at all likely to come off on top. Red Slayer's confidence in himself was not misplaced.

Yet he had certain fears—not grave fears, but rather wholesome respects for antagonists. He respected Big Reddy and the other foxes, because their noses were as good as his, and if they caught him out on the open, some distance from a wall or broken ground or thick bushes, they could make it hot for him. He respected, in winter, the great horned owls who lived up in the mountain woods where he often went to hunt deer-mice. The owls, with their uncanny eyes, and their advantage of being in the air where the scent escaped him, had to be watched for carefully, of course. So did the hawks in the warmer seasons. He respected, also, his cousins, the mink, who lived by the meadow brook—respected and a little envied them. He not infrequently wandered down through the meadows on his hunting expeditions, both in winter and summer. In winter there were many field-mice to be had there, and in summer luscious young meadow larks on their nests

in the grass, and sparrows, too, and grasshoppers and such small fry. As he wandered along the brookside, he not infrequently came upon signs of his cousins, and once he found the body of a Pekin duck, half in the water, half out, its neck viciously bitten. That was the work of a mink, he knew. It was a fat duck, freshly killed that night, and Red Slayer cautiously investigated the carcass. He was tasting a morsel of the flesh when a warning odor smote his nostrils, and rearing his head, he looked across the three feet of running brown water directly into the snapping black eyes of one of his cousins, who was also rearing a sleek brown neck, out of the grass on the farther bank.

Cousin mink opened his mouth slightly, showing white teeth, and made a remark. It was not the sort of a remark regarded as good form between cousins of gentle breeding; certainly it disclosed no sense of the good fellowship of consanguinity. Red Slayer knew that his unamiable cousin had some inches the better of him in the primitive style of argument for which he was evidently preparing, and deemed discretion much the better part of valor. He fled. But he

couldn't help envying the mink that fat white Pekin duck, which had so thoughtfully strayed down from the farmyard up by the road. It was not exactly fear, and not exactly respect, which kept Red Slayer out of the barnyard itself. It was rather the sense of mystery, of the unknown. Close around the dwellings of man were strange smells and alarming noises, there were cats and dogs and unexplored recesses into which one might run for safety, only to find himself trapped. It was Red Slayer's common sense instinct to avoid the houses and barns of man.

Nor had he, so far in his life, needed to visit them. There was plenty of hunting without. He liked to hunt at night, for then the deer-mice were up and about in the woods, often dancing in some tiny glade, where he could pounce upon them; the partridges were sleeping in a nest of leaves on the ground; the rabbits would be coming by on their little packed highways on the snow, beside which he could crouch and wait. But he often hunted by day, too. It was a matter of mood, and the state of his stomach. He was tricky in his hunting, too, with several dodges

which he worked. One of his devices was to follow the line of a fence which ran along the road, passing one post on the north, the next on the south, the next on the north, and so on with the regularity of a shuttle in a loom. Along this fence were many weed and grass stalks sticking up above the snow, for the mowers never get quite up to a fence line, and the mice came here to feed on the seeds. By passing the successive posts on alternate sides, Red Slayer was first screened from the view of one side, then of the other, and seldom enough did he go the quarter mile length of that fence without making a sudden spring and landing his teeth into the throat of a mouse. If he was merely hunting for the fun of it, he left the mouse where it lay, scarcely drinking its blood. If he were a bit hungry, he ate the brains. If he were still more hungry, he peeled back the skin and ate the flesh. But sometimes he carried the mouse away, caching it in his wall, against a lean spell. When the snow was very deep and the hunting poor, he thus stocked his larder when game came his way.

This particular winter, after he had come to

live in the chipmunk's hole, the snows were frequent and the world was buried deeper and deeper under them, and it was bitter cold. More and more Red Slayer found himself hunting because he was hungry, and not just for the fun of killing, and he began to take longer chances. More than once he hunted where he knew Big Reddy, the fox, was hunting, too, in the hope of getting a rabbit. It was his good fortune one day, traveling over the snow with his black tail about all of him which you would have noticed, to come upon fresh rabbit tracks leading into a dense thicket of shrubs and very small trees. He sneaked in under the bushes silently and swiftly, his nose telling him the game was near. There were, in fact, no less than four rabbits in that thicket, each one crouched under a mat of overhanging shrubbery, taking a midday snooze. These rabbits, too, had been hungry, and only the night before had come upon a stand of seedling maples, with juicy terminal buds in easy reach. They had fed well, and now were taking their ease. Red Slayer slunk up close to the nearest one, which stirred uneasily, some sixth

sense telling him danger was near. Even as Red Slayer sprang, the rabbit leapt, also. But he was too late. The weasel's teeth were fastened in his neck. Red Slayer had just missed his aim at a vital artery, however, because of the rabbit's spring, and the two went down on the snow, leaping and thrashing about, the rabbit kicking at his own neck frantically with his powerful hind feet, and Red Slayer engaged in the twofold occupation of hanging on and avoiding the blows of those feet. The snow grew red. The weasel needed all his snake-like litheness to maintain himself, and work his hold over to the vital artery. But he succeeded, and the rabbit ceased from struggling with a last convulsive kick. Then Red Slayer feasted.

But, meantime, the other three rabbits, terrified by Red Slayer's coming, a creature hardly a quarter their size, had leapt frantically out of the tangle of bushes, knowing that they were safer in the open than in a region where the weasel could slip through with a speed as great as their own. Had it been a dog or a fox pursuing them, they would have dashed into the bushes instead. A

man, crossing the fields, saw them emerge above him into the pasture and hop rapidly away, and wondered why. No dog emerged in pursuit. There was no hawk or owl overhead. Yet it was plain they were flying from some mortal peril. But his curiosity was not strong enough to lead him back into the bushes, and that is why Red Slayer was not hungry that night, but full to repletion as he snoozed in his snug, stolen chamber.

But food grew scarce again, and sometimes Red Slayer wandered for many days and nights, miles and miles from home, without satisfying his desires. He traveled through the woods smelling for deer-mice and red squirrels (who often saw him and scolded him angrily from their safe perches in the trees), and sneaking around rocks, from the north side, to pounce by chance on some partridge that might be huddled under the warm southern face. In the woods, at night, or in the dusk of late afternoon, he heard the mournful hoot of the big horned owl, and kept his path so far as he could under the protection of laurel leaves or ferns or rocks, with his eyes ever watchful for the deadly, flitting shadow above,

and for the nearest hole into which to dive. He traveled over the meadows, too, and along the fences, and went into old stone walls looking for squirrels and chipmunks, and even into woodchuck holes looking for sleeping chucks. It was a tough hide around the neck a chuck had, to be sure, but there was a softer place under the throat, and one couldn't be too particular when hungry. Still, this was a last resort.

Then Red Slayer's mind reverted to the Pekin ducks in the barnyard. Driven by hunger to overcome his aversion to the unknown, he crossed the road one moonlight night, nothing but his pale shadow and his black tail tip showing over the snow, and sniffed around the barnyard. His nose took him to the hen-house, and he found easily a crack through which he could enter. Once he was inside, the hens began to stir on their perches uneasily. Red Slayer went quickly up the roost pole, and fastened himself on the neck of the nearest fowl, killing it and feasting on the blood. Now the whole roost was in commotion. The hens were fluttering and flapping about, and making a tremendous noise. The taste of blood

filled Red Slayer with joy. The noise and terror of the hens delighted him. He sprang upon a second fowl and killed it. Then he sprang upon a third. He was hungry no longer, but filled with the lust to kill. He had just fastened on the throat of a fourth bird when the hen-house door opened, a blinding light flashed in, and a man and boy entered. Red Slayer let go of his prey and cast about for a means of escape. He sprang into a dark corner, but the wall was solid there, and the blinding light followed him. Now the boy sprang at him with a club, while the hens were dashing madly around. The door was open, but it was behind the man. Yet it was his only hope, for under that had been the crack where he entered. Red Slayer made a spring for it. The club descended, just grazing his tail. Between the man's legs he dove, out into the night, and away, pursued by the sounds of cackling hens, angry voices, the baying of a dog, the excited stamping of the horses in the stable. Up and up toward his wall he went. Yet even as he bounded, his nose caught on the still, frosty air the scent of a mouse, and he dropped to his stalking pace im-

mediately, once more the hunter, not the hunted, and with a clump of dead goldenrod for cover stalked his game, and brought the prey back to his cache in the wall. His heart was beating normally when he reached his hole. Warm and satisfied, he slunk into the burrow, and went to sleep.

It was two days later that the Terror came.

The sky had been gray and overcast all day, and when Red Slayer started out from his wall across the open snow, toward evening, he cast no shadow. Neither was it easy to make out objects against the dull and neutral sky. But he wasn't looking upward with any care, to be sure, for out here on the open he had no fear of the great horned owls, who lived in the forest above and were not at all likely to come out over the pasture, not while there was daylight, at any rate. There were no hawks, now, in the dead of winter. With so much open space about him, in fact, he had no fears at all, and went leaping along over the crust light-heartedly, thinking only of his possible kill.

Then, with startling suddenness, he was aware

of a rushing in the air above him. His head shot up, his eyes turned skywards, with the lightning rapidity for which he was noted, and he had an instant's vision of something grayish white and huge, with red eyes, shooting down upon him like a meteor. Have you ever seen a watch spring suddenly leap from the open case and fly out across the room? Much like that, Red Slayer seemed to uncoil and leap away. He turned in the air, or at the instant of landing, you could not have said which, and fled back toward his wall. But as his feet left the ground on that first spring, he felt the rush of the great bird just behind him, the blow of cloven air at his back, the snatch of a talon grazing his tail. As he leaped madly for his wall, varying his direction with each jump, he heard the beat of the wings behind him, too, for the bird had wheeled and come on to strike again. He dared not look back, but once more he felt the monster strike, and once more the talons grazed the black tip of his tail. With terror at last in his heart, he dove into the protection of his wall, and from a safe hole he looked up and watched the strange bird circle and swoop three or four

times directly overhead, angry at the loss of his quarry.

It was a big bird, more than twenty inches long, a grayish white below, slate colored above, almost a gun-metal color as he banked against the dull sky. He had powerful yellow talons, and a wicked gray beak and fierce, piercing eyes with red irises. He flew, Red Slayer could see, with tremendous power, and, as the weasel well knew now, he dropped to strike with terrific speed. It was a bird he had never seen before, and one he never wanted to see again. He did not know what it was, for no goshawks had come down here from the north before in his lifetime, but the fact that it was here was self-evident, and for the first time in his life terror entered into Red Slayer's heart. Nothing on earth had saved him then but the black tip to his tail. Seemingly making his otherwise white body conspicuous on the snow, it had in reality caught the eye of the hawk so strongly that he couldn't help striking at it, and as a result the main portion of Red Slayer, so to speak, was past the danger point. But this protection would not always work. Hereafter there

was a menace in the air above which he could never ignore, never forget. He could never cross the open fields in safety, he could never let himself get far from cover.

When next he ventured out he went down to the road by the wall, and up the road under cover of the fence and roadside brambles, and finally reached a hen yard just in time to see the Terror suddenly drop from over the screen of a tree, pick up a big rooster which must have weighed much more than he did, and bear it instantly aloft, while the startling flash and roar of the farmer's gun, from a corner of the barn, did not come till he was well in the air again, and affected his flight not at all. The sight so soon again of his new enemy, the 'roused barnyard, the stinging smell of powder, the presence of men, all conspired to send Red Slayer slinking off, without any attempt to get a meal of chicken or duck or young turkey. Instead, he went a long way into the woods, searching for mice or rabbits, and spent the next day far from his burrow, and resumed the search after a rest in a hollow stump. He had picked up a fresh

rabbit track, and followed it greedily but craftily, coming at last within striking distance of his prey, a big European hare, crouched beneath a snow-laden young hemlock. This hare was too speedy for him to overhaul in a chase, of course, and he was debating whether it was not also too large for him to attempt to kill by stalking and leaping. He had never been hungry enough to attempt such a feat before. But even as he debated, the hare moved out from under the tree with a couple of odd, crouching hops, and nosed a shrub inquisitively to see if it was edible. Red Slayer slunk a trifle nearer, and then, with the same abrupt and terrifying suddenness as before, the gray death dropped over the screen of a tree like a falling cannon ball, and hit the great rabbit like a bomb.

There was instantly a tremendous scuffle, which Red Slayer watched, fascinated, from the shelter of his bush. The hare was so heavy the hawk could not lift him clear of the ground as long as he was putting up resistance, and he was strong enough, too, to roll and kick with his big hind legs, striking the wings of the bird. He

strained with his neck to get his mouth, with its razor teeth, into some part of his antagonist, and between his kicking and biting the feathers flew from the bird even while the blood flowed from the hare. Now and again the hawk would get him clear of the ground, only to be forced down again a few feet away, where again the snow was trampled, the long, powerful hind legs kicked, bird and beast rolled and bounced and battered each other. But the hawk was ever striking with his cruel beak, hanging on relentlessly with his talons, and at last the hare lay still on the red snow. The hawk stood upon him and tore his flesh, before he flapped his feathers straight again and rose with the carcass.

But meanwhile Red Slayer had slipped away unobserved. He had seen all he wanted to. The Terror was growing in his heart.

For the most part, of course, it was bigger game than weasels the goshawk was after, but he scorned nothing in the way of meat, just as Red Slayer himself would devour a grasshopper on his way to kill a chicken. And some instinct told Red Slayer this was so. He redoubled his cau-

tion. He never entered or left his burrow across the open snow, but always by way of the stone wall and the fence below or the woods above. Yet the Terror was unpredictable, and unsmellable.

The end came when Red Slayer was engaged in the (for him) harmless occupation of skinning a mouse not eight feet from his wall, at a point where a single spring would carry him into an impregnable cave. There were no trees near. The sky above was free of birds. Not a wing marred the rosy flecks of dawn clouds. Red Slayer had just lifted his head to see.

But what he did not reckon on was the fact that the stone wall cut off a certain part of the celestial arc from his lowly view-point. The Terror, flying low toward the wall, simply flowed up over it, and struck. This time the body of Red Slayer was between his own black tail tip and the dark body of the mouse. The mouse held the bird's eye as well as the tail. He sprang—but it was too late. The talons sank into his beautiful white fur, into his slim, sleek body. The Red Slayer was slain.

The goshawk swung upward with the limp white form in his talons, the black tail tip dangling and swaying in the wind of the flight. On strong, steady wing beats, he mounted higher and higher, and his steel gray body, outlined a moment against the rosy flecks of dawn sky and the sweet, pale blue, grew indistinct against the dark wall of the mountain forest as he headed for some secret perch in a gnarled tree up the crags.

CHAPTER IX

RASTUS EARNS HIS SLEEP

THE story of Rastus really begins with the arrival of Wolf under the mountain. If you ask me what kind of a dog Wolf was, I cannot tell you. His master said he was a short-haired collie (which sounds like a contradiction in terms), but there was more than one bar sinister on his family coat of arms, and one of them meant a hound's nose and another tremendous endurance. We'll let the sagacity come from the collie strain, if you like, though all my own collies have been more ornamental than sagacious. At any rate, the advent of Wolf was distinctly an event, and a disturbing event, in the life of Rastus and all his fellow 'coons on the mountain.

Before Wolf's arrival, the only dogs in the immediate neighborhood were two magnificent and costly Saint Bernards. These two amiable creatures roamed the mountainside at will, to be sure,

but I've never heard of a Saint Bernard being employed as a 'coon dog; certainly Benedick and Beatrice would never have been selected for that arduous and highly specialized profession. All a 'coon had to do to escape either or both of them was to amble up the nearest tree—anything would do, from a two-hundred-year-old oak to a ten-year sapling, just so it did not bend with the weight—and stay there till the dog went away, or else move into another tree, drop to the ground, and amble off to safety. The result was that Rastus and his fellows were almost entirely without fear of dogs, and rambled by night where they chose, seeking meat even in the garbage cans and washing it in the brook which ran down through the hemlocks beside the big house, or now and then raiding the chicken yard or the cornfield, for though they were not vegetarians, they were not averse to green food at times, especially corn. Indeed, they ate nearly anything.

Rastus originally was one of a large family of five. He came of a hardy race, too, for his father, who weighed twenty pounds, had gnawed his own tail completely off the winter before

Rastus was born, because it had become embedded in an ice cake during the winter hibernation. After thus heroically freeing himself (it must be admitted, perhaps, that the heroism was not quite so great as it seems, for a 'coon can take more punishment with apparently less pain than almost any other animal), he came out from his den into a sloshy March world, and foraged for food, being lean and cold and brittle of fur. He was caught in the act, and put in a washtub, with a barrel inverted into the tub and a piece of two by four braced between the barrel and the ceiling of the cellar, to keep him locked in. When morning came, the two by four had fallen, the barrel was heaved off the tub, and the father of Rastus had vanished through a cellar window. That very night he was again captured, at a neighboring house, and put in a chicken coop and fed bananas. In the morning he was gone, having gnawed his way out, preferring freedom to tropical fruit. These two Houdini-like performances gave him a certain distinction, and certainly argued great strength in a body weighing only twenty pounds when fattened for the autumn,

and much less than that after a winter's hibernation sleep. However, the man who first caught him should have known he was strong, for this man, dragging him out of a hole he was trying to dig into a frozen drain, got him with both hands back of the head and tried to hold him down in vain. So long as the 'coon had his four feet on the ground, he could literally carry the man along on his back.

After his second escape, father 'coon got back to the mountain cliffs and wilderness, and was later privileged to see his five offspring, among whom was Rastus. The family grew in a wild, up-ended land of forest and precipice and rocky caverns, leading down to lumber slash and then to farms and the big house, beyond which, on the plain, were more forests and swamps, and two or three ponds. It was a splendid land for 'coons. The trees were big and plenty, the caverns in the precipitous rocks were even better and safer than the trees for dens, there were plenty of small game and birds, in the brooks were trout, in the swamp ponds crawfish, in the fields corn. And, as I have said, the neighborhood dogs were a

FATHER 'COON GOT BACK TO THE MOUNTAIN CLIFFS AND WAS LATER PRIVILEGE
TO SEE HIS FIVE OFFSPRING, AMONG WHOM WAS RASTUS

joke. It was small wonder Rastus grew up to a full twenty pounds of sharp face, the bead-like eyes ringed with black, and black and dirty gray furred body, without much fear of man or beast, and without any great resort to the instinctive strategy of his race. There had been nobody, in fact, even to name him Rastus.

Then Wolf came. Wolf had a master who came with him, but the master did not figure much until autumn, while Wolf started in immediately, the May violets being still in bloom in the woods. Wolf was a born 'coon dog. Down south they have 'coon dogs, I'm told, but I never thought much of any I ever saw. At least, they'd be of little use on our mountain. They are hound dogs, and they bay on the scent. If a dog bayed on the scent of one of our 'coons, the 'coon would be off so far in advance that he would get safely to his den in the rocks, where nobody could get at him, and the dog would never tree him at all. Wolf had a hound's nostrils, but no bay. He followed a hot trail like a silent race horse, and he never barked till he was certain he had his 'coon up that particular tree beneath

which he sat on his haunches. It was a pretty sight to watch him work when the scent took him to a tree trunk. His nose went up the bark as high as he could raise it, but no sound came from his mouth, except, possibly, a faint whining complaint, as if he were muttering out the puzzle. Instead, he would drop back and circle the tree, perhaps fifty or a hundred feet away. If he didn't pick up the scent again in that circumference, he would enlarge it to a diameter of a hundred or even two hundred yards, and again complete the circle. Only after a second failure on this larger arc would he return, satisfied, to the tree, sit on his haunches, raise his eyes to the branches, and wake the echoes.

This was a totally different proposition from the hunting of Benedick and Beatrice, and after Wolf had roamed the mountain for a week or two, putting up 'coons at first not a hundred feet from his dooryard and catching three or four as they foolishly attempted to spring out over him to the ground and escape, Rastus and his fellows began keenly to realize the difference. The word was passed around, as such things are in the wil-

derness, and all the 'coons, especially the older ones, began to exercise that instinctive strategy which is their heritage. By July, Wolf's bark at night, which at first had often resounded close to the house, was now heard faint and far away, up the rugged mountainside, and most often among the limestone cliffs where tiny cave mouths led in to inaccessible and impregnable recesses no dog could enter. There was frequently a note of plaintive anger in his bark now, so you could almost tell whether he had the 'coon up a tree or had trailed it to a den mouth.

Rastus had two or three experiences with Wolf during the summer, but he managed to come off free in each case, learning something from each one, too, if it was only caution. And in each case it was his curiosity which got him into trouble. But you can't cure a 'coon of curiosity, except with an ax. Did you ever have a pet 'coon? If you have, you know something about the curiosity of the breed, and something, too, about their humorous tricks. A wild 'coon, of course, has the same curiosity and the same humorous tricks—only there is none to see them.

A 'coon, being nocturnal in his habits, works largely by scent and touch. His small eyes may be keen enough, but he seems to prefer to take the testimony of his nose first, and then even more of his forepaws, which, in spite of their sharp claws, appear to have a great delicacy of perception. They can look, and feel, almost like hands at times. The 'coon's most amusing trick, or mannerism, is his fashion of investigating the contents of a basket, say, by taking everything out of it with his hands, while keeping his head turned the other way, or looking upward toward the sky—anywhere except where his hands are exploring. This gives to his action a quaintly surreptitious air, as if he were determined not to let even himself know what he was up to. If he is investigating something that may contain food, his hands appear to reject what, to him, is unedible, by tossing it aside, and when a nut or bit of meat is clutched, a look of crafty joy suddenly radiates the sharp little face. Taking the bit of meat, if possible, to water, he holds it between his two front paws and sloshes it back and forth, back and forth, till it is washed white and pulpy,

before he eats it. You may wash it almost to a pulp for him, but he will grab it from your hand and rewash it himself before eating.

The wild 'coon, of course, has all these traits. I have lain by the shore of Lake Drummond, in the heart of the Dismal Swamp, when there was a heavy blanket of night fog four feet thick hanging over the water, and heard the 'coons washing their meat, or fishing, close by me, but quite invisible under the fog veil. In the morning I would find in the mud the print of their feet by the shore, the hind paw marks uncannily like the print of some shriveled baby's foot. If you could have watched Rastus at night, you would have seen him, when ranging the woods, get up on every fallen log and run along it, poking his paw down into crannies of the bark, feeling for grubs. When something glittering caught his eye—a bit of quartz, a piece of tinfoil dropped by some hunter from a cigarette package, you would have seen him approach it, look up into the trees, pick it up on his forepaws and thus investigate it. You would have seen him climb up trees, too, and poke his hand into holes where chickadees or

woodpeckers might be nesting, or climb out along limbs for the nest of thrushes or warblers. You might at times, also, have seen him over by the shore of one of the ponds, sitting perfectly still on a stone or a log overhanging the margin, his eyes fixed on vacancy, one paw dangling in the water. But if you had been able to watch long enough, presently you would have seen that paw yank up with a lightning quick stroke, and a crawfish fly to land.

It was one evening in late summer that Rastus saw firelight glowing on top of Black Rock, a rough precipice jutting out like a bowsprit from a shoulder of the mountain, with a flat top on which picnic parties were sometimes held, when you could find enough men and especially women who were not afraid of the rattlesnakes which lived on the faces of the naked cliff itself. Rastus, led by his curiosity, moved over toward this firelight, while it glowed redder and flickered lower with the coming of night, and as he drew near his nose caught the smell of meat—of bacon, no less! The picnic party had departed; Rastus had heard them go laughing down the trail which

skirted the rocks. He moved in to the fire cautiously, however, for fire was something new to his experience, found a big bacon rind, and scurried away with it into the deeper thicket. He was on his way toward a trickle from a mountain spring, to wash this food, when he heard Wolf and his master coming back up the trail. The full moon was now rising over the eastern world rim and flooding the open spaces with its pale radiance. Wolf's master had returned for a forgotten basket of knives and forks, but glad, too, of the excuse to see the moonrise from this commanding promontory. Wolf, however, was blind to æsthetic effects. His nose began to wiggle, his nostrils to quaver, as he reached the fire ring, and with a joyous little moan he was off on Rastus's hot trail.

When Rastus heard him coming he was in a scrub oak thicket—not a tree big enough to give him any security from Wolf! He didn't have time, he knew, to get to the tiny brook, which otherwise he could have used to hide his track. Running water tells no tales. Accordingly he almost doubled on his tracks and actually passed

by Wolf not fifty feet to the leeward. Wolf's master had seated himself on top of the rocky bowsprit, to enjoy the moonrise and to see what would happen on Wolf's hunt. As Rastus approached, however, he heard nothing, which was not strange, for Rastus was making no sound. The way a 'coon can slip over the ground, even over dead, crackly leaves, with no sound whatever except a kind of whispered rustle as if from his own fur, is almost uncanny. The man did not see Rastus till the 'coon stood on the edge of the rock, in the full moonlight, not twenty feet away. He kept perfectly still, and Rastus evidently did not see him at all. Rastus was looking down, as if measuring the distance or inspecting the ground below. He slunk along ten feet further, where the jump suited him better, and plumped off. The man heard the thud as he landed on a ledge forty feet below. Then he heard no more down there, but a second after the pant and soft whine of Wolf, coming hot footed back on the trail.

When the dog found it to end abruptly at the edge of the precipice, and could not pick it up

again on either side, he actually emitted a sharp *yip, yip* of exasperation, and then, without paying the slightest attention to his master, proceeded painfully to find a way down through the scrub at one side of the precipice. A few moments later his master heard, very faintly, his whine as he picked up the scent again. Then the man waited for the bark that indicated a treed 'coon.

But the bark never came. Instead, to the man's amazement, a few minutes later he heard a faint sount to one side and a bit below him, and a thud of a pebble bouncing on the rocks. Then the sharp nose of Rastus emerged over the rim, and the gray, sleek body of Rastus behind it, and drawing himself up on level ground, the 'coon glided noiselessly and without haste across the open space of moonlight and disappeared on his first trail into the woods; and, if you ask me, I think he picked up that bacon rind on his way back and took it to the brook, walking a long way in the water and emerging without further fear of pursuit.

A moment after he had passed the man, Wolf

arrived at the base of the cliff. Looking over, his master could see, in the bright moonlight, just how Rastus had gone up a tall tree which had thrown a limb against the rocks, and by using this limb easily reached a sloping gully that made a road to the top. Wolf, however, was completely baffled. There was only the one trail to the tree. He ascertained that. Then he came back and studied the trunk in silence a moment. Finally he sat down and barked. He'd treed his 'coon, he told the world. And Rastus was a mile away, eating bacon rind!

Wolf's master whistled the dog off, and went down the mountain reflecting on the marvelous instincts of the wilderness folk, which teach them such lessons in the strategy of retreat. When he got home, he looked up his guns and lantern.

"Wolf and I are going to get that Rastus this autumn," he told his wife.

"That who?" said she, surprised out of her grammar.

He laughed. "Such a big clever 'coon has to be named Rastus," he answered, and told her the story.

Meanwhile Rastus had been having other troubles not connected with dogs and men. He was the father of a large and growing family of five, which had to be looked after by himself and their mother pretty much all summer, for they were not born till late in May, and at first they were as helpless as kittens, and later, as they grew up and could get around a bit, they had to be taught how to climb trees and to be watched when the parents went abroad, for they insisted on following when they got a chance, and cried like babies if they couldn't keep up. When the corn was in the milk, Rastus would take the whole family down to a cornfield and they would reach up and strip the ears, eating their fill—which was considerable, and spoiling even more than they ate. Then they all had to be led safely back again to the snug, safe den up in the rocks before daybreak. It was fortunate, perhaps, for all the family that Wolf's master did not get his hunting idea until after the children were grown enough to shift for themselves, and they could scatter if necessary at the signs of danger.

Rastus and his mate were out one night, under

the harvest moon, headed across the hundred-acre hole in the forest where the lumber had been cut and only a scattered tree left here and there as a seed bearer, when Wolf and his master, also out for an evening stroll up the lumber road (the man had no gun), cut across their trail. Free of the children, the two 'coons were bound for the pond over in the swamp, to fish, but willing to pick up anything in the way of food, animal or vegetable, on the way across the farms. It was certainly hard to be interrupted violently by the panting of Wolf on their trail. They made for the nearest sizable tree as their only immediate salvation—a white oak, and went up it, till they were amid the spring of the branches, where they crouched down practically hidden from the view of any one below. Wolf completed his two circles of the tree, and then squatted beneath and bayed his decision that the 'coons were up there—the 'coons, he knew, though his master supposed there was only one.

"Want me to go up and shake him down, Wolf?" his master asked.

The dog barked still louder.

The man embraced the trunk, and began to shin. He made much harder work of it than the 'coons had done, but he got to a limb at last, pulled his leg over, stood up, and peered into the branches. Ten feet above his head, he saw, to his surprise, not one, but two dim forms curled into crotches on opposite sides of the trunk, and two pairs of eyes watching him intently. He began to climb again.

As he neared the 'coons, Rastus began to move slowly out along one limb, his mate slowly out along another. When the man reached the limb Rastus was on, and got his weight fixed against it ready to shake, Rastus was far out amid the tip branches. Before the man could shake, however, completely to his surprise Rastus jumped. He landed with a crash of broken sticks square in the middle of a pile of rotted down slash, and of course Wolf sprang toward the sound. But even as he landed and Wolf sprang, his mate plopped off the end of her limb at the opposite side of the tree, and while Wolf was yet just short of the slash pile where Rastus was hidden in the hole his fall had broken through, Wolf heard the thud of

the second 'coon. He whirled around and dashed toward this second sound, bewildered by surprise. Then Rastus, from his slash heap, suddenly uttered a strange cry, something like the hoot of a big owl. Wolf turned again and sprang toward it. No sooner were his feet on the slash pile when the same cry came from the other side of the tree! Again he turned, and made a dash. The man in the tree, who had scrambled hastily down to the lowest branch, to observe the fun, now saw the second 'coon making off, a dim, ghostlike, blackish-gray ball, into the underbrush. Wolf got to the spot where she had vanished when Rastus cried again—cried as he, too, was slipping away. Wolf, thoroughly bewildered now, caught like a runner between third base and home plate, turned yet again, and actually danced a circle in his own length under the tree as the cry was repeated behind him. His master slid down the trunk and put him on Rastus's trail—but there was a small brook not two hundred yards away, and the trail ended at the border. Wolf returned to the hearth rug that night with a drooping tail.

After that, Wolf's master, who was the best kind of a hunter because he had a great deal more curiosity to find out how animals behave and how they defend themselves than he had lust to kill them, determined to keep on giving the 'coons a fair chance and see what they could make of it, while Wolf did the killing, if any was done. Because he knew that Rastus and others fished along the shore of the swamp pond he put a canoe on the water, and with a powerful flashlight in his pocket and Wolf in the bow, he would go out at night and paddle as quietly as an Indian (for he knew how to feather under the surface) along the shore, till he felt, if it was too dark to see, the dog's nostrils quiver, and the tip of the canoe as Wolf, in excitement, leaned to one side. Then he would drive the bow sharp in shore and suddenly turn on his flash, as the dog sprang for the beach. Sometimes the flashlight would catch the 'coon actually sitting by the water and staring with eyes that shone red into the beam of light—to vanish as its body vanished when Wolf sprang. Wolf ran down two or three young 'coons and one older one before they could tree; but two

other old 'coons reached their trees and then jumped out into the water, easily outswimming the dog and escaping.

That taught Wolf something. He was learning about 'coons every night now! Accordingly, when it was the red eyes of Rastus at last which stared into the flash, and Rastus who went up the swamp maple overhanging the pond, Wolf was out up to his spine in the water, ready for the fall. Rastus, with his night-piercing eyes, saw this, and didn't jump. The man had to climb the tree for him. He crawled out on a limb over the water, but a good shake and a sudden snap sent the 'coon down. He was fat now, weighing a full twenty pounds, and he couldn't hold on against that snap. Into the water he fell with a splash, and Wolf with one bark of joy was at him. But that was the last bark he emitted. His master, hearing no sound but a splashing and churning of water, turned the flash downward and saw only white foam churning thirty feet out from shore, and what looked like Wolf's back. He slid down the trunk, suddenly fearful for his dog, and waded out. The water was up to his

neck and his feet were sunk deep in mud and threatening to sink farther when he at last reached his dog's tail and pulled. The dog came toward him, and getting an arm around under his neck, he lifted Wolf's head out of the water and struck sharply under the jaw. The dog's mouth opened, the 'coon, which was in it, but at the same time also curled completely around the muzzle, with teeth and claws working, dropped and shot away through the water. It was a bleeding and half drowned dog that was got to land. Twenty pounds of 'coon around your muzzle, every pound fighting, when you yourself cannot touch bottom with a single one of your four feet, to get a brace and lift your head up, can drag your head under water and hold it under! Even that wouldn't be so bad, if the 'coon couldn't stay under any longer than you can. But he can stay under indefinitely—or so Wolf must have thought. It was a wet and dejected pair, master and dog, who paddled back across the pond. Rastus, however, battered enough to be half dead if he hadn't been a 'coon, had been saved from a broken spine or crushed ribs by Wolf's inability to make a clean

strike in the water, and by now had landed and was on his way up the mountain toward his den, to sleep himself back to normal in his nest of dead leaves.

Wolf's master's mistress said, when her dripping husband arrived home and emptied the mud out of his boots, that she should think he'd had about enough of 'coon hunting, and he replied that he guessed he had. But a few nights later, when it was frosty cold and clear, with a golden October moon shining on the last shreds of golden foliage in the maples, and Wolf had healed up a bit (though one ear would never be the same again!), and his master's boots had quite dried, and the mud was scraped off and they were freshly oiled, the man was seen by his wife to be filling his tobacco pouch and testing the oil in his lantern and the battery in his flashlight.

"Again?" she said.

"Just for a bit of a ramble over the mountain," he answered. "It's such a beautiful night."

"Beautiful fiddlesticks!" said she, showing that women are incapable of understanding the lure of a 'coon hunt.

It was well on toward midnight when Wolf picked up a trail, which as luck would have it was that of Rastus, and started hot foot through the woods, then down the mountain, across the meadow, toward a tiny pond not more than thirty feet across—really a big spring hole—in a swampy corner of a hayfield. Rastus hoped to make this little pond, which had a sedgy brook for an outlet, before Wolf caught up to him, but he couldn't do it. It took every notch of speed he had to make the white ash a hundred feet short of the pond, and scramble up into the safety of its branches. There was no tree adjacent to afford him an arboreal highway. He would have to stay in that tree if Wolf was alone, or jump for it if the man creature, who climbed trees and shook limbs, came along behind. Wolf was sitting on his haunches on the dead leaves below, waking the echoes of the still autumn night, when Rastus saw the bobbing light of a lantern approaching over the field. Presently, as he curled his body along the upper side of a limb and peered over at the ground, his eyes looked into the dazzle of a flashlight beam, and he heard the man's ex-

clamation when his eyes, in turn, caught the twin red glints from the tree.

"You've got open ground for fifty feet," the man said to Wolf. "If you can't get him when I shake him down, you're a poor pickle hound."

Then came the sound of a lantern being set upon the ground, and the crunch of leather and khaki on bark, as the man began to shin. As the man drew near, Rastus crept farther and farther out on his limb. Had he planned what he was going to do? Did he know the country below so well that he could plan? Were his night-trained eyes so superior to the man's and the dog's that he saw things they could not? Who can say? I only am sure that he had been often in this neighborhood, and I surmise that, like other wild animals, an instinct told him always to know every foot of his country. At any rate, this was what happened. The man shook and snapped the limb, Rastus fell off—and fell directly into the only patch of shrubs and briar anywhere close to the tree. Wolf sprang like a shot at the sound of the fall, landed with the characteristic collie

bound, forepaws downward to pin the game right in the little patch of briars—and found nothing whatever there! With a yelp, he dashed over them, and rushed with nose to the ground, in an expanding fanlike radius. Then he came back to the briar patch, smelled, scratched, barked, looked worried, and dashed forth again. By this time the man was down from the tree. He poked thoroughly into the briar patch, and then took Wolf to a rail fence not far away and held him up to run his nose along that, on a chance that somehow the 'coon had reached it and run along it to conceal his scent. The rail was "cold." Back Wolf tore to the briar patch, his instinct telling him Rastus must be there. Suddenly he whined, and tore along a new scent—from the briar patch to—to the little pond! The pond had an outlet brook. Rastus had escaped! Not a hundred yards down that brook, the thick woods began, and the 'coon could have gone up directly from the water into any one of scores of trees, and traveled thenceforth far above the ground.

The man went back, leaving poor Wolf to

circle the pond over and over, like a whining merry-go-round, picked up his lantern, and proceeded to a thorough investigation of that clump of briars. Quite concealed within it was a small, flat rock, and under this rock a natural cave, into which a woodchuck had burrowed. Going through the tangle, you could step on the rock, but you could not step into the hole, for it was covered by the overhang of the stone. Rastus had simply taken refuge in that hole, and perhaps the woodchuck scent had confused the dog. Why had the 'coon not stayed there? Was the woodchuck still actively awake, so late in the autumn, and had he objected to the intruder? Or did the hole become so small that Rastus couldn't get in as far as he wished for safety? That was unlikely, surely. Or had he actually watched for the opportunity to make a break for the pond? The man pondered these questions, and wished he had, for once, the nose of a dog so he could arrive at some conclusions. He whistled Wolf up, and showed him the hole. Wolf took a few digs at it, but refused to become really excited. He knew his particular quarry had gone toward

the pond. So master and dog, at two in the morning, returned slowly and empty handed across the fields, hoar frosted and cold to the feet, under the chill October moon.

That was their last encounter with Rastus. When winter came on, Rastus at first decided to den up in his rock cave, but a warm, melty day precipitated the same sort of trickle through a crack that had made an ice cake over his father's tail, necessitating an heroic operation, so Rastus, being wiser, forsook the den, taking his mate with him, and two of the children also, who had stuck around with the old folks. They climbed out on the damp snow, foraged a bit for food, and came to the great chestnut which was hollow at its first fork, high above the ground. Up it they went, one by one, and into the hole above the spring of the huge limb, a hole invisible from the ground. Inside the hollow were five other 'coons, who stirred wakefully at the arrival of the newcomers, for the day was warm, but offered no resistance. Working into such nooks and corners of the interior as were not occupied by 'coons, Rastus and his family likewise settled down, curl-

return of spring. And Rastus, at least, I think you will agree, had earned the right to leave no call.

CHAPTER X

"THE LAST AMERICAN"

HE clasped the crag with crooked hands, but he was not close to the sun in distant lands; he was eight hundred feet up on a ledge overlooking the wild gorge of the Deerfield River, where it breaks out of the Green Mountains, hits a buttress of the Berkshires, and turns east to cut its way to the Connecticut. To be exact, he was not even clasping the crag, but the storm-twisted stem of a low pitch pine which grew on the crag. As he sat there, intent and still, the brown river rippling over its shallow, stony bottom like a thin ribbon far below him, the juts of naked rock around him, across the gorge the precipitous opposite wall and then the fold on fold of wild, tumbled, forest-clad hills, he made a picture peculiarly fitted to its rugged setting. He stood almost three feet high, his feathers a glossy blackish brown where the sunlight glinted on wing

curve and shoulder, his head and neck as white as snow, his bill and feet yellow, and a hint of more snow white where his tail could be seen below the folded wing tips. He, the bald eagle, the largest and most powerful creature that now takes the air over our eastern lands, since his cousin, the golden eagle, has vanished, he, the symbol of America, emblem of our might, emblazoned on our shield (and our money!), sat like a carved image eight hundred feet above the rippling brown ribbon of the Deerfield River—watching for a dead fish!

His distant relatives, the duck hawks, two of whom had nested not far away, on these same precipitous ledges, for many years, live on birds, killing them on the wing. The fiery goshawks who come down from the north in winter are the terrors of the air, killing for the pure love of the fight, and attacking any game, even poultry or rabbits twice their own weight. The low-flying cooper's hawks (Baldy could see one of them now, below him, flowing up over a small orchard in a farm tucked down like a piece of green carpet by the side of the river, and diving like a

bullet in among the chickens) falls upon his living prey and kills like a bolt from the blue. But the bald eagle, in his serene strength, his majestic beauty of flight—preys upon dead fish. At least, he preys upon them when he can, in summer. Hunger, or the demands of his young, may drive him to other offal, or even to killing. But he is, nonetheless, driven to it. His nature is not pugnacious; his instincts may be vulturine, but they are pacific. Not Jove's thunderbolts but a carrion pickerel should be represented in his talons, were we realists in our art.

But we are not realists. Man lives by symbols. His imagination transcends facts. See, Baldy rises suddenly from his perch on the cliff side, and with a kind of barking scream, *cac-cac-cac,* and a few air-stirring beats of those vast wings, more than six feet from tip to tip, leaps upward, banks, ascends on a spiral, and is now overhead, against the blue! Look at him now, and do not marvel that man has placed the thunderbolts of Jove within his yellow talons, or carved his form upon a nation's shield! Against the sky he is outlined with sharp distinctness, the outer feathers of his

wings a trifle separated, letting through the light. All brown has disappeared from his plumage—he looks jet black now, save his splendid white head and neck, and the great white fan of his tail. His domineering eyes are still visible, too, as he banks and swings in soaring loops above the hole of the river gorge, keeping his head down, his vision fixed below him. How superbly easy is his flight, over what spaces he seems to float on the buoyancy of air, with spread wings motionless, what power to strike would be his if suddenly those wings were folded and the thunderbolt fell! A great, brave bird, for battle born, his very cry a challenge! So splendid a sight was Baldy, as he swung his loops over the gorge, and suddenly saw his prey below him, a prey totally invisible to the human eye from the top of the precipice, even with powerful glasses, and, folding his wings, dropped a dead weight through space to snatch from the river—a dead fish.

Yet Baldy, the eagle, had his battle, his long, incessant battle—his battle to rear his young and perpetuate his breed; only it was not waged with other birds or other beasts, but with man, with

the very Americans who had proclaimed him their national bird, their proud and dominant emblem. And in this battle, he, like all the other creatures of the wild, was at a tremendous disadvantage, for to man alone belongs the coward's weapon which kills from afar—gunpowder. Before gunpowder, man had bows and arrows and spears. If, instead of primitive man, some other creature had learned to kill from afar, how different would have been the history of the world! But that is idle speculation now. To return to Baldy——

As he rose from the river with his fish, he did not come back to a tree on the cliff to devour his meal. Instead he climbed rapidly till his piercing yellow eyes could see well over the upper rim of the gorge, on either side, and then sailed westward, following the curves of an erosion cañon which ran back into the folds of the hills, hiding a rushing stream at the bottom, beneath its hemlocks. Soon, from the rock where he was first seen, he became only a moving fleck of black and white against the dark mountainsides, and then the eye lost him and could not tell where he sank into the tree tops—if he did sink into the tree tops

instead of passing on and up over the crest of the divide.

As a matter of fact, far up at the head waters of this cañon brook, almost two thousand feet above sea level, and surrounded by dense forest and laurel hells, was a small mountain tarn, a spring-fed pond of a dozen acres, its waters looking almost black from the accumulation of leaf mould on the shallow bottom. Just back from the rocky shore of this pond, rising a trifle above the other hemlocks so that its top commanded a view of the water, stood a great hemlock. It was not yet dead, but it appeared to be dying. In the last strong fork of its top was a big structure of sticks. It was toward this nest that Baldy dropped, *cac-cac-cac*-ing as he sank. His call was answered by a lower toned, broken call from a tree close to the shore, a sound which, coming suddenly in the silence of the forest, was as startling as the laughter of a maniac, which it somewhat resembled. At the same instant, Baldy's mate rose from the limb where she had been watching the water. And at the same time, too, a noise arose from the huge lump of sticks

THE NEST IN THE HEMLOCK

like a gigantic inverted thimble, in the tree top—the noise of two small and very hungry eaglets anticipating dead fish. Both parents sank to the rim of the nest, where they stood outlined sharply against the sweet May sky, and the fish was apportioned between the infants, which were then two yawning gullets opening into a small collection of white, downy feathers. There is a time at the beginning of its career when even the human infant is not a pretty thing, save to its infatuated parents, resembling rather a wizened Chinaman or a four alarm fire than something fashioned in the image of its Maker. A baby bird, especially when about to be fed, is even less pleasing to look upon. Yet Baldy and his mate were tremendously pleased with what they had produced. And why wouldn't they be? This nest was built on the ruins of one they had made the year before, and in which the mother had laid two sets of eggs. The first set had been laid on the first day of March, and the chicks broke through the first of April, only to be taken almost immediately by some man or boy while both parents were away fishing. Two more eggs were

laid, and this time the eggs were taken before they were hatched. It may have been by the same person—the parents never knew. Baldy's mate, seeing something in the tree while she was in the air a full five miles away, had made for the spot with all speed, but the robber saw and heard her coming before she was near enough to do anything, and slid rapidly to earth, with the precious eggs. As she hovered and dove, crying and screaming, over the spot, a flame smote her eyes, a noise assailed her ears, and something twanged by her in the air, nipping a wing feather as it passed. There were no more attempts at a family that year.

But now, this second spring, the nest had been rebuilt on the ruins of the old (making it, to be sure, yet higher and more conspicuous), and two eggs had been laid and hatched, and no robber had come to disturb them. They were proud and happy parents at last. And what wonder and beauty they added to the wild mountain uplands, as their calls dropped down from the high air into the silence of the forest; as they looped their majestic circles over the billowing waves of tree

tops that were mountains and gorges, but which, from their altitude, looked like a heaving green sea; as they sat silent above the mountain tarn, the rushing river, or perched on the rim of the nest, a living sculpture of the nation's shield set against sky-blue enamel! The forest watcher, a wild duck on the pond, perhaps, could sometimes hear Baldy's high, clear *cac-cac-cac* when Baldy himself was actually invisible, or at most a tiny black speck, no larger than a pin point, against the white bosom of a cumulus. The ducks knew that call! They knew, too, that Baldy's yellow eyes could see them when they could not see him. They grew alert and watchful, ready to dive.

For Baldy and his mate were often driven to seek other game than dead fish. It is a part of man-made warfare to establish a blockade and starve out an enemy. Under this method, the enemy is helpless; he cannot strike back. He can only do his best to keep body and soul together on what is left of his own resources. Similarly, though unconsciously, man has warred on the eagles, among other birds and beasts. He has cut off or taken away their food supply, as

well as directly attacking them in battle. When I was a boy, I will not say how many years ago, men used to drive a few miles into the north woods from a certain village in Maine and bring out two hundred trout in a couple of days. They fished with two or three hooks on a line. To-day a couple of trout in as many days in that stream would be a fair catch. In those same days the eagles bred in the pine-hung gorges where the stream cut through the mountain defiles. They breed there no more. It is hard enough to fight nest robbers and hunters, but harder yet to keep the race going with the food supply cut off, for an adult eagle is a big bird, and a baby eagle is a hungry one, and both of them need much provisioning. So it was hunger—his own or his children's—that drove Baldy to his many departures from his most instinctive diet of dead fish.

When the ducks passed northward on their migration he would sometimes spy a flock, floating on some little, wood-encircled pond, as he coursed the upper air watching the earth-panorama below. Then he would drop down and

hover above the spot, hoping perhaps that some duck might be weak or crippled or young, and so an easy prey; but, failing to see such a one, he would strike anyway, into the startled flock. A canvas back duck, or a grebe, however, he never succeeded in getting, for the race is not always to the strong. Sometimes it is to the quick and crafty. Any diving bird could almost invariably escape him. He could not cleave below water as could the osprey, or great fish hawk, who lived over the mountain by the big pond. Consequently he hunted the water fowl as little as need be, for he hated effort spent in vain. Rather, when dead fish were few and hard to find, he preferred to cruise for miles a few hundred feet up above the river bed, or circle over lakes and ponds, his wonderful eyes bent downward, watching for live fish under the water, estimating their distance from the surface, waiting the moment they should rise to the top to give him the chance to snatch them out of their element. This great, lonely bird, coursing the waterways on tireless wings, was fighting an incessant battle, after all, the long battle with hunger, for the preservation

of his own life and the perpetuation of his breed.

And how long it took his brood of young to put on their wing feathers and escape at last from the terrible conspicuousness of the nest into the freedom and concealment of the forest! Baldy might well have envied the robins and sparrows and the other little birds who get their broods quickly out and foraging, or especially the pretty brown grouse whose chicks can scurry into the protection of the undergrowth almost as soon as they break the shell. While his two fledglings were still more white than brown, and quite helpless, a mother partridge in the forest below, not three hundred yards from the eagle tree, was leading her twelve or fourteen chicks, little puffs of daintiness, into the shelter of last year's leaves. It would be August before his young hopefuls, still without the proud white collar and white fanned tail, but brown all over save for little streaks of white, would be able to mount the nest rim, hop up on a branch of the hemlock, look scared and stupid, and then fall off into clumsy flight, while he and their mother swooped over-

head and round about, illustrating and crying encouragement. Meantime, they were growing all the while, with enormous appetites, and they dwelt in a great nest as conspicuous to any person wandering in that forest as would be a huge hogshead tied to the peak of the Methodist steeple. But so Baldy's parents, and their parents before them, had built the nest, and no experience taught him concealment, no instinct came to his rescue. When, in the dim ancient days of his race, the nest had been built that way, the eagle knew no fear. He was king of the air, and only from the air could danger come or, if it came from below, the higher in the tree, the better for the nest. Accordingly the instinct was fixed to build it there, and when man finally came as his enemy he was utterly unprepared to meet the new foe. Instinct, of course, is the greatest conservative force in the world. When it is a law of one's being, it precludes change. Nothing can change it but the power of reason. When an animal changes its instinctive habits to meet new conditions and thus protect itself, we may fairly credit it with something like reasoning powers.

When it does not change its instinctive habits but falls a victim to them, it surely lacks what a Yankee would call the ability to put two and two together. So much for the brains in Baldy's snow white, viking head.

Yet he knew a thing or two, at that. He knew, for instance, that the osprey, the great fish hawk, was a far better catcher of live fish than he was, and he knew he was a better fighter than the osprey. At any rate, he was ready to chance it. Accordingly one day after heavy rains had raised the stream levels and made fishing difficult, Baldy rose high in the air and drifted over the divide toward the pond where the fish hawk lived. As he crossed the range, he rose higher still till he was a speck against the blue, a floating speck that yet could see most that went on below him. The osprey was nowhere visible at first, and Baldy patiently swung in great circles, with the least possible expenditure of wing effort, keenly watching the air and the forest below him. His patience was at last rewarded, for he saw a second speck coming from afar, a thousand feet lower than he was, headed toward the pond. The eagle

tilted his planes and rose yet higher, to escape observation. But the osprey was watching the water. He, too, was hungry. Far below Baldy, he too circled, a smaller bird, but still impressive, with his five-foot spread of wing. Had Baldy been a philosopher, he would have reflected that the fish hawk, also, even as himself, was fighting an unequal battle against man, not so much, perhaps, to protect its nest of sticks in a tree top by the pond, as to find food in the ponds and streams where once fish were so abundant. Residents by the seashore can have little idea how rare a fish hawk has become by inland waters, except in the migration seasons. Even Baldy himself, in fact, knew of no other hereabouts. But Baldy was not philosophizing just then. He was thinking only of fish, and watching the hawking bird below him, on whose sleek back the sunlight flashed. Slowly and still as a feather falling he wound his way down the invisible spirals of the air to be near his prey, until he, too, could see right through the brown, sun-flecked water of the pond to the sand and weeds on the bottom, and his eyes caught the ghost-wraith of a pickerel moving languidly

about. Though he could see it, he could not estimate so well as the osprey its distance from the surface. He grew impatient that the osprey did not strike. Then the fish became clearer; the great hawk dropped like a plummet, his talons buried in the water with unerring aim as his big wings went out like brakes and instantly he rose again, the fish held fast, and started for the woods above the rocky shore. Then another bullet fell. Baldy tore at him through the air, almost colliding in his passage, and with a precision of aim no less marvelous than the hawk's when he struck the fish in the water, the eagle shot past his feet and snatched the fish away. The hawk, who had caught the wind of his coming, and put on steam to get away, was screaming angrily as the great black bird tore by, and struck at him with his beak. But the blow was vain. With a *cac-cac-cac* of shrill triumph, Baldy was off with his stolen feast, rising on mighty wing beats toward the crest of the eastern range. Unto the victor's children belong the spoils.

There were other food quests of Baldy's which were less spectacular, but perhaps almost as satis-

fying. Once he found the body of a rabbit killed by a weasel in the woods. Again he spied five fish in a pail on the bottom of a boat drawn up on the shore, and the fishermen nowhere visible. (It was noon and hot, and they had retired to a cool spring in the woods.) When they returned the pail was upset, the fish gone, and not a track but their own in the muddy margin around the bow of their boat. They still discuss the mystery. Yet again, coursing over a pasture early one morning, while the sun, visible enough to Baldy from his aerial pathway and casting a rosy light on his snow white neck, was still hidden by the mountain wall from the valley farm, he saw a dog stalk a flock of sheep, cut out a lamb, and kill it. Baldy was excessively hungry that morning, and his young back in the eyrie, were, he knew, calling pathetically for food. Below him was a dead sheep, and none to dispute possession but a brown and black dog, which even now was craftily dragging the little carcass toward a thicket where he could feast unseen. Made bold by need, Baldy swooped, uttering his *cac-cac-cac* like a battle cry, and struck for the carcass. The aston-

ished dog, with the rush of wings above him and then the almost complete envelopment of his body by the beating things, let go his hold, almost instantly to repent and spring at the foe. The lamb was dead weight, and Baldy could not lift it in time to avoid this spring. Crashing his wings down, to keep the dog from getting the carcass, he struck with his beak at the dog's eyes, and for a brief and savage moment the fight was furious. Once the dog got a grip on the lamb, almost pulling the eagle out of the air, but Baldy managed to strike him clear, and rise with one great wing shove just out of range, and maintain that level up along the pasture top to the woods, where he hung the carcass over a limb, tore apart as much as he could conveniently carry, ate a bit himself, and then rose and headed for home, well satisfied.

But it was a fatal morning's work, nonetheless, for the farmer, walking from the barn to the house with a pail of milk in each hand, happened, as luck would have it, to glance up the pasture just then, and saw Baldy take the air with what certainly looked like part of a lamb dangling

from his talons. Then he saw the flock huddled in their stupid terror at one corner of the pasture. The dog, of course, had disappeared. The farmer never saw him. He set down the pails and started up the slope. Yes—a lamb was missing! The man cursed Baldy. Then he suddenly remembered that a year ago young Rob Browning, before he went down to the city to work, had found somewhere up in the hills an eagle's nest, and brought two young birds home (which, to be sure, had died). Rob said eagles used the same nests year after year. That night, when the chores were done, the farmer got out the family ink bottle, spit on the pen, and wrote a letter to Rob. When the answer came, he called in two neighbors, and they started off up the mountainside, with guns on their shoulders.

Rob's directions were, for them, easy to follow, for they had logged over these mountains in years past, or hunted 'coon and wildcat. After nearly three hours of steady plodding they emerged on a point of rock that commanded a view of the wooded hollow where the tarn lay, and they scanned the tree tops, almost immediately

spotting the nest. It was nearly time now for the young eagles to fly; a few days more and they would have been safe! But this was not to be. There they were, up on the rim of the nest, great brown conspicuous things with eyes scanning the sky for a vision of father or mother coming with food. The three men exclaimed in triumph, dropped down the rock into the scrub, and made as fast as they could for the eagle tree.

Finding a spot not far away where they could secure an open sight of the nest, they concealed themselves under the boughs of a low hemlock and waited for one or both of the parent birds to return. They were warned first by the sudden impatient racket of the two eaglets, and then by a far, high scream from the air, before they got a glimpse of the parent bird at all. It was the mother returning with a fish. She did not see the danger lurking under the hemlock screen, nor catch the glint of steel peeping through. Unsuspecting and happy, she dropped lightly as a parachute to the nest rim by her babies, and began to give them food.

Three tongues of flame spit from the hemlock

on the ground. Three explosions jarred the silent air. One eaglet fell back into the nest, one crashed over the edge into the eagle tree and fell, bouncing from limb to limb, till it hit the ground with a thud. The mother, falling also, flapped screaming with one broken wing, caught at a limb with her talons, could not hold her weight, and likewise fell to the ground. The men sprang forward. She half raised her proud head, her yellow eyes ablaze, and made ready for a last stand, but a blow came down on her white forehead, and she crumpled in a heap.

"Get her out of sight," said one of the men. "We'll wait for the other one now."

They dragged the mother and the little eagle which lay on the ground in under the hemlock with them, and waited a long time. But Baldy was coursing a stream far away, and did not return. An hour, two hours, went by, and still they did not see him coming. One of them grew impatient and lit a pipe. Another did the same. But now Baldy was in sight of the nest, though he was three miles away and almost a thousand feet up. He looked down for his

babies, for his mate—and saw only one still body lying in the rough thimble of sticks. Dropping down lower as he sped on, his keen eye saw the faintest almost imperceptible smoke wraith drifting up from the hemlock blind. He had never seen anything like that before, except from men, or about the houses of men. Suspiciously he circled, dropping lower and lower, and suddenly calling to his mate in shrill *cac-cacs*. There was no answer. No answer from her, no answer from the nest. The single form within it lay still. Baldy knew it was dead. His piercing eye kept watch where he had glimpsed that smoke, and he saw a hand part the boughs a little and push up something that gleamed. Instinctively he shot up a few feet, as the gleaming thing spit and roared, and he heard the bullet twing past his ear. Another great downward shove with his wings, and he sprang higher still, wheeling and crying in anger and perplexity. Gradually he sank toward the nest again, but again came the spit and roar from the hemlocks, and again the twing of something past him, this time clipping a feather from his tail. He shot up violently, and swung

his circles far aloft, widening them slowly till the loop carried him a mile or two away, and then, as he banked and swung back, he saw distinctly three men in the open, watching him, and one of them holding his dead mate by the feet! They thought he was too far away to see them! As he came wheeling back, high aloft, they jumped under the hemlock again, but he did not sink. Instead he passed on, still crying shrilly, and faded to a speck against the afternoon sky. The hunters gave him up, and started homeward, carrying their two kills which had fallen, but leaving the baby up in the nest.

" 'Tain't worth stuffin'," they said, " leastways, 'tain't when you have ter shin a seventy foot hemlock ter git it."

But Baldy, swinging back now, saw them passing over the rock whence they had first spied the nest, and unseen of them, because he was against the sun, dropped down low enough to make quite sure it was his mate they carried, her great, bedraggled wings trailing the ground. Then he shot upward and looped far to the north, to the east, to the south, and only as the sun was setting

came down to the lonely, pitiful nest and looked close at his dead baby.

That night he perched, his head on his breast, in a tree close by. In the morning he rose and called his mate, as if his cries might bring her, but no mate came, and no shrieks for food came from the great mass of sticks in the hemlock. Baldy circled slowly, indeterminately, in the upper air, the dawn light rosy on his head and neck and tail. Then, as if some impulse had suddenly come, he spiraled up and up till the cloud around the peak of Greylock was but a white mat on the floor of the world, and far off to the east, like a silver wire, was the flash of a great river. He pointed into the east, and sailed to meet the sun.

All that morning he flew, high at first, and then lower, over the great river, save where the smoke of cities caused him to shoot aloft again, and in the afternoon his ears heard a strange bumbling in the air and his eyes saw coming at him, with incredible speed, the most astonishing bird he had ever beheld. Compared to it, he was as small as the tiniest humming bird. And it was above him,

too, though he was flying at the thousand foot level. Its wings did not dip and rise, but were rigid—yet it moved, it came rushing on, a mysterious blurry circle at the centre where a head ought to be. As it tore by above him, with its incredible speed and more incredible, jarring whirr, he banked to follow it with his eyes, beholding a man creature sitting therein! Then it, too, banked as if to turn, and Baldy worked his wings with all his power, fleeing down the fields of air to escape.

But the plane had only sheered off to the west, and soon the jarring bumble grew fainter and died away. Then Baldy saw the shining floor of the sea, blue and far away—a great pond lying to the rim of the world. It drew him down the air lanes with steady beat of wings, and in a patch of woods by the great pond margin he came to rest, and thought of fish.

The fishing by the sea was good—better than he had even known before. He wandered down the coast till he reached a land of salt water ponds making in behind the yellow sand bars, and behind them a region of thick swamps, with fresh

water ponds in their depths, and tangles of scrub oak and pine where no roads led, no clearings told of hated men. And here Baldy came to rest once more and called a certain pitch pine home.

But he took no other mate. There were other eagles—a few—in those swamps and along that shore. But his mate was dead, and he wanted no other. Age was upon him now, age and loneliness. He had done his best to fulfil his function and raise new eagles to soar above the land which called him its national bird; but this same land would not permit it. He had fought his fight—and lost. So, like King Philip of old, he made his last stand in King Philip's swamps, or soared, a proud and solitary figure, over the murmuring shore of the ocean, looking with those piercing eyes—for a dead fish. It was so little he asked of the land, after all. He was as harmless as he was magnificent—as harmless as a wren. Yet no wren but can rear its brood in houses built for it by man, while he, without a mate, must fold his great wings in the deepest swamps. Such is the fate to-day of him who clutched Jove's thunderbolts.

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